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WILD HORSES *and* GOLD

BOOKS BY ELIZABETH PAGE

WAGONS WEST

A Story of the Oregon Trail

WILD HORSES *and* GOLD

From Wyoming to the Yukon



CARRYING SLIM WITH THEM, THEY PLUNGED DOWN INTO THE CREEK

WILD HORSES *and* GOLD

From Wyoming to the Yukon

by

ELIZABETH PAGE

Illustrated by PAUL BROWN



FARRAR & RINEHART, INC.

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TO MY MOTHER

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Foreword

A BITTER wind was tearing through the street driving the snow in little spurts under the closed sashes of the windows to lie for a moment unmelted on the black paint of the sills. Few people ventured out to the doctor's office in such weather and now the early dusk of a Wyoming winter's day was falling. One doctor had already set out on his evening round of calls and the other was just emerging from the surgery with his last patient as I switched on the lights in the reception room.

The tall man with the powerful shoulders and keen gray eyes who had been coming in for daily dressing of an infected hand was talking as they came out, and he lingered talking still, evidently reluctant to face the wind and snow.

"Storms!" he was saying. "God, yes! We was out in one storm so bad you couldn't see the team ahead of you. We all got lost that night. Slept out in the snow all over the place wherever we could find a hole to crawl into."

I stooped over my desk, trying to appear absorbed in my papers, but actually with ears shamelessly cocked toward the two men by the sizzling radiator. I had been told something of this Kansas Gilbert, to give him the name by which he is called in the succeeding pages, and the doctor had promised to try to persuade him to tell me his story. Several previous attempts to draw him out in my hearing had been unsuccessful, however, and it was probably the snarling wind and rattling window-frames that stirred old memories to-night and loosened his tongue. Under the doctor's skillful questioning he talked on and on, while I made rapid notes on the margin of the engagement pad and on the back of a sheaf of blank checks rendered useless by the failure of the bank. I dared not disturb them by moving to get more suitable paper, for Kansas Gil-

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bert was unfolding a tale of incredible enterprise, a saga of wild horses, of a strange overland way to the Klondike, of love in the wilderness, and a search for gold.

Gradually as he talked he had drawn me into his audience and during succeeding days when he was waiting in the reception room for his turn with the doctor we reverted to the subject. Thus I learned that he had kept a diary of his trip which I convinced him should be made the basis of a book. The diary in itself was disappointing, but night after night when my work was over he met me at the doctor's office and with the worn little pocketbooks in hand filled out the meager hints of action with colorful detail. The complete framework of this story and practically all the incidents in the first eleven chapters were outlined in the memories of this ex-cattleman. He has since read the manuscript and corrected it chapter by chapter.

Early in the research which was necessary to fill out these outlines it became apparent that the route taken by Kansas and the cowpunchers of his party had historical significance. The Edmonton Trail to the Klondike, although it has apparently never been written about, was nevertheless used by unknown thousands of men in the early years of the gold rush, in 1897 and 1898. They set out from Edmonton either northwest to the Peace River or northeast to the Athabaska. Those who went northwest had a choice of routes when they reached the Peace. They might turn west and north through a thousand mile maze of mountains to the headwaters of the Pelly that joins the Yukon at Fort Selkirk above Dawson, or they could go east and join the route from the Athabaska on the Slave River, cross the Great Slave Lake, go down the full length of the Mackenzie to its delta and cross the Continental Divide to a branch of the Porcupine which empties into the Yukon some two hundred fifty miles below Dawson.

Late in the fall of 1897 men began to gather at Edmonton and as soon as a crust was formed on the snows of that winter the hordes took the trail. The official report of the (then) Northwest Mounted Police for 1898 states that "a few men" came through that fall. A member of the force who was in Dawson at the time

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says the number was less than twelve and he adds that only thirty more arrived by that route in 1899 having been two years on the way. All the other thousands did not die, for some turned back before it was too late, but it is safe to say that for every single man lost on the White and Chilcoot passes hundreds perished on the Edmonton Trail. From the point of view of tragedy it deserves remembrance.

The experience of the party which Kansas Gilbert led is pre-eminently fitted to give a comprehensive idea of the route for when they reached Peace River they divided, part going overland, and part "around by the rivers." The difficulties of both types of travel are therefore covered, and Kansas himself crossed the Rat Portage where the greatest loss of life occurred. The diary which Kansas kept dealt only with the river route, but through the courtesy of Canadian librarians and archivists of Provincial and Dominion Governments, and especially the office of the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, it was possible to build up a background of fact for the overland journey, not covered by the diary of the principal adventurer. This was supplemented by a trip to Edmonton and into the Peace River Country where through especial consideration by the Hudson's Bay Company I was able to travel for a few hundred miles along the river in both directions on the dividing trails of the Klondikers, to see and talk with men and women who remembered the days of the Klondike rush or who had seen service in the Mackenzie posts of the Far North. At Edmonton through the kindness of E. L. Hill, of the Public Library, and J. E. Lundie, a member of the Library Board and himself a former Klondiker, I met with a number of men who were in Dawson in 1898 and 1899 and who gave me the incidents on which the Dawson chapters are based.

For those who may wish to know the exact sources of the narrative an appendix has been added, which also contains an amazing confirmation of Kansas Gilbert's story given by a man in Peace River Town. In the back of the volume as well there is an alphabetical list of all the Klondikers mentioned in the diary with the complete quotation of the section referring to each man. This is

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done because of the realization that there may be, still surviving, relatives and friends to whom even meager information may be welcome.

To others who are not interested in the fine points of historical accuracy but who just want to know whether a story is "true," I can honestly say that only the details of the love affair have been invented, filling in the space between the beginning and end which were known. Every other incident actually befell some man or woman on the Edmonton Trail.

Acknowledgment is Hereby Made to

Mr. John Hosie, Chief Archivist of the Province of British Columbia, Mr. E. S. Robinson, Librarian, of Vancouver, Miss Hazel Bletcher, Librarian, of Lethbridge, Alberta, Miss Nina Moran, Librarian, of Basin, Wyoming, for advice and assistance in research;

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Chapter I

THE HORSEWRANGLERS SET OUT

THE late September sunset had made so strange a thing of the familiar scene that Kansas Gilbert reined in his horse on the bench above the little town and stared. Before him the road dipped abruptly from sight to reappear on the rough planking of the bridge that spanned No Wood River. It wandered a bit uncertainly across the flat, dodging unruly clumps of greasewood, aiming for the square false front of the Big Five Saloon which marked the beginning of Bonanza's one street. Between the buildings where the road itself was again hidden the level rays of the sun had turned a light veil of dust to a high, golden screen, through which the shapes of saloon, hotel and store loomed indistinctly and against which the nearer buildings stood in featureless relief. The trail emerged from the western end of the street into a pool of unearthly light before the Jackson ranch-house in its wire enclosure, and then climbed the bench on the opposite side of the valley to disappear beside the windswept cemetery on the knoll. A dark army of shadows concentrating below the graveyard extended its front down the hill, an exaggerated silhouette of mounds and markers, and advanced along the road against the

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glory on the flat with the sinister threat of a cross. It was enough to make a man pause.

A sudden lift of his horse's head drew the rider's attention from his silent consideration of the golden promise above the town and the symbol of death on the trail. With pricked ears, Roman Nose was watching the western badlands beyond the town, and Kansas followed his intent gaze. The moving shapes against the far shadowy hill were not cattle, the forequarters being higher than the haunches. He reassured the horse with a stroking hand upon his neck.

"It's only them range horses, Roman Nose. Movin' down early this year, ain't they? . . . Come, get along. We don't want winter to find us still on the road."

With the accustomed caution of the mountain-bred horse, Roman Nose picked his way over the brink of the descending trail, and a few minutes later Kansas fastened him to the tie-rail before the Big Five Saloon, where he stood, head down-drooped and haunches slack, in the radiance borrowed from the sky.

Within the Big Five dusk had already come, and Jim the barkeep was laboriously hoisting his heavy bulk onto a protesting chair to reach and light the tin-shaded lamp swinging from the joist above the two green-covered pool tables. The players had suspended operations to watch his progress and to offer a bet as to what might be expected if his groaning support should collapse. Kansas slipped in unnoticed and leaned against the bar.

"That's all right, boys," the fat man was saying. "This here chair has helped light this lamp times enough to be properly broke to the job."

"We sure won't have to dig no grave for you, Jim," rejoined the nearest billiard player. "You'll go plumb through this floorin' and plant yourself right."

Jim paid them the tribute of a rumbling chuckle as he descended to the safe level of the floor and, puffing from the exertion, moved his chair out of the space between the tables needed by the players. This brought him in line with the newcomer, and he hurried behind the bar with the light step which his size rendered surprising.

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"Well, now, cowpuncher!" was his greeting. "What brings you to this oil man's town?"

"Oh, I just dropped down," drawled Kansas. "Thought I'd take a final look at all of you before the last man gives it up and moves out to the hill there."

Slim Jackson detached himself from the group by the stove and drifted over to the bar.

"We ain't dead yet, Kansas," he said, "but I'll admit we're failin' powerful fast."

Barkeep Jim ran a polishing cloth over the counter and looked from one to the other, his round face radiating a genial invitation, nowise diminished by the kindly shrewdness in his blue eyes.

"What'll it be, Kansas? The usual?"

"The same," gravely returned the cowman. The barkeeper produced a bottle and two glasses, and all three relaxed for a chat.

"What do you know, Kansas?" was Slim's beginning.

"Mighty little." Kansas sipped his drink, eyed it carefully against the lamp, then tossed it off. "It's goin' to be a hard winter. Horses comin' down from the range already."

"Never seen so many this time of year," agreed Jim.

"And there ain't no price at all on cattle," added Slim. "It'll be a hard winter all right." And in silence the three considered the melancholy in store.

The distant jingling of harness and the scream of brakeshoes on iron tires brought them all to instant attention. Jim leaned back to peer through the window into the dusk outside.

"Stage is in, boys," he announced to the room in general. The loungers by the stove rose and trooped to the door, the billiard players leaned their cues against the wall and filed after them.

Kansas made a move to follow but Slim laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"You won't be able to get your mail till that bunch of oil drillers hears all about the Klondike. Since this field begun to peter out, they been watching the horizons faithful for something new

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to turn up. And news of any kind of a strike sets 'em plumb crazy."

"You bet!" added Jim. "They nearly wrecks the store fightin' for the papers every time the mail comes in. The driver always comes over here to get away from them. So if you wait right where you are, Kansas, you'll get the latest news served up proper."

The door opened even as he spoke and a tall man with an erect youthful figure stepped quickly inside. As he came under the rays of the hanging lamps and pushed back his hat, his face was revealed, seamed and weatherbeaten, the face of a man of sixty, skin stretched shining over the bony structure of the skull, and a straggling fringe of gray mustache scarcely hiding the thin lips. He drew off his driving gloves and accepted the bottle which Kansas pushed toward him, and the glass which Jim brought out, averring meanwhile that in his opinion all Bonanza was as crazy as hell.

"What do you think of this Klondike excitement?" asked Kansas. "Anything in it?"

"Oh," grudgingly admitted the stage-driver, "they got gold all right, I guess, but how are you goin' to get it? Hell of a country, no roads, and horses—say, they'd give three hundred dollars a head for horses but they ain't none to be had even for that money."

"How should there be?" rejoined Jim. "It's a long swim from Seattle or San Francisco to Alaska by all they tell me."

"And mountains to cross when you get that far," continued the stage-driver, "that would make these Big Horns look like a prairie-dog town."

"But that ain't the only way to get there." This from Slim, and all turned on him.

"The hell it ain't!" scoffed the stage-driver.

"Well, it ain't," reiterated Slim. "I'm thinkin' of goin' myself and I got a guide-book from Canada."

"What's Canada to do with it?" queried the indignant stage-driver. "Alaska belongs to Uncle Sam—bought it with good money just after the war. I remember when they done it. Seward's Folly

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they called it. I guess though if this gold strike pans out they won't—"

"The Klondike ain't in Alaska," asserted Slim.

"Jim," came in plaintive appeal from the stage-driver, "is Doc Daws still around here? This young feller needs lookin' after. He's—"

"Let him talk, old timer," said Kansas. "What's the idea, Slim? Is they another way in there?"

"There is," replied Slim, drawing a paper-backed pamphlet from his pocket. Kansas caught the title KLONDIKE OFFICIAL GUIDE before his friend had it open. "See here!"

His finger pointed to a page which he quickly found by its dog-eared corner. "They call it the Edmonton Trail. There's the map. You can see for yourselves how straight it is. And here's what they say about it. 'The Edmonton Overland Route,' " he read triumphantly, "'the shortest, cheapest and best way to reach the richest gold fields ever discovered. Travel in any direction is perfectly safe. No fear of Indians, plenty of fish in the river and quite a lot of game both small and large. No hardship to speak of need be anticipated. The route has been in use by the Hudson's Bay Company for years and sportsmen travel through our northern country at all seasons of the year for pleasure.' "

Even the stage-driver was impressed.

"Does dudes travel it?" he exclaimed.

"That's what it says," retorted Slim, "and it sure wouldn't be no trick for a man to do it, and with horses, too. Cold—sure it's cold, but no worse than winter ridin' in these mountains. We've all done that and it ain't killed us. And this Canadian trail is all broke out for us."

"If it's as easy as all that why ain't they all a-goin' that way?" asked the stage-driver in a dying effort of incredulity.

"Maybe they don't know that the Klondike ain't in Alaska," replied Slim maliciously. "This here is a Canada trail." He turned the title page of his guide-book out. "'Printed in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Compliments of the oldest outfitters for the North.' They're right where it begins. They ought to know if

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anybody does."

"You bet!" agreed Barkeep Jim.

"Anyway, I'm goin' that way." And Slim folded the guide-book and returned it to his pocket.

"Better take along a few of these range horses, Slim," advised Kansas. "They'd come in handy on the road, and if you could sell 'em for four hundred dollars a head, you wouldn't need no gold mine."

Slim regarded his friend fixedly.

"If I had your hand with horses—" he began. "Look here, Kansas, why don't you come with me? If you was to wrangle a bunch of them horses, we could have 'em in the Klondike by spring. While we was there we could take a look around at their mines, but if they didn't look good, we could still come home and not have to borrow the price of a drink from Jim, here."

Kansas laughed.

"Whichever way you worked it, horses or gold," his friend persisted, "you'd make more than you can with cattle this winter. Your wife could keep things together over one season with the help of the neighbors, and you'll be back for next fall's round-up with a neat little pile—or else you'll be strikin' it so rich you won't neither of you care whether you keep your ranch in Wyomin'."

Kansas shook his head though the smile still lingered in his eyes.

"You're sure persuasive, Slim. You make me feel almost as irresponsible as corn-fed baby beef on the trail to market; but I have a sort of sneakin' notion the end of the trail might be as surprisin' to me as it is to those same calves."

"Just the same it ain't such a bad idea. You sleep on it, Kansas, and I'll come up to the ranch to-morrow."

Kansas was moving toward the door.

"You're welcome as daylight up there any time, Slim. But you'll find that me and Kitty is a hard herd to stampede. So long, old timer. So long, Jim. Don't let Slim here coax you off to the Klondike. It would sure be suicide for a man of your build."

"How's that, Kansas?"

"Them natives lives on blubber, they tell me."

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The barkeeper, with his explosive chuckle, wadded his towel into a missile that whizzed behind Kansas' head as he dodged out the door.

With the mail buckled in the saddle pocket, Kansas and Roman Nose jogged back over the trail up the eastern badlands. Even the lights of the little town were lost in the fold of the valley behind them. Around was an unfathomed immensity of space, gathering to an accented line of shadows where the Big Horns met the sky. The dim radiance of the young moon did little more than blur the darkness, but the horse knew the road and the man with slackened rein let him have his head.

Kansas was smiling to himself over Slim's proposal to drive wild horses as if they were a bunch of cattle bound from Texas to the range in Wyoming. And yet it was not such an impossible idea. The wild horse, whether born on the open range or escaped from a hated captivity, was resourceful and keenly intelligent, combining his uncanny wisdom with a seemingly exhaustless strength and endurance. He owed his existence to his ability to forage for himself, even in unpromising country, and he was used to long and bitter winters. He knew how to paw down to feed through deep snow, how to keep open a drinking-hole in a freezing lake. He could sense the coming of a storm, and was a master at drifting before the wind to the shelter of high rocks or thick trees. Yes, Wyoming wild horses were winter-wise, and a man who knew them, Kansas decided, ought to be able to take them to Dawson, even though the trail was new. He rather hoped Slim would try it.

The trail climbed steadily if smoothly and the rider measured the hours by the landmarks passed and recognized with some sense other than sight. To his ear the dried grasses of Dead Man's Gulch made an uneasy rustling all their own. The wilder tang of sage and juniper where the desert made its last stand, told him that he was entering the irrigated valley of Hyattville long before the clustered lights of the settlement winked through the darkness at his right. And an hour later the bark of a coyote echoing from the tilted face of the Medicine Lodge Cliff was his first token from the home place.

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The moon had set but the star-pricked vault of the sky marked the familiar outlines for him. He turned off the trail to open a gate that let him into a grassy track leading across the home pasture with the long black shapes of two haystacks crouching like sleeping monsters on either hand. The path climbed gently to where the ranch-house stood beneath a giant cottonwood, the dim bulk of the outbuildings on the left, and on the right the murmur of Medicine Lodge Creek chuckling over its escape from the canyon. The house was set in the narrow gateway of this canyon as if guarding the shadowy space behind it filled with starlight and mystery.

Kansas stood for a moment at the corral gate after he had turned Roman Nose in with the other horses, following with his eyes the high rim of his valley from the strange sacred rocks of the Indians on the west to the vast slope of the Big Horns on the east, sweeping up past the broken wolf-haunted cedar breaks to the smooth pastures and black timber masses of the nearer summits. By night he was always acutely conscious of the brooding secrecy that lay like a spell on the natural enclosure, ghostly reminder of those medicine men who had carved their secret writing on the cliffs and kindled their ceremonial fires in this hollow for untold years. To-night his hands tightened slowly on the rail of the corral fence as if he feared something would draw it from his grasp. What could the gold of the Klondike give him that was better than this which he had?

It was very late when he entered the kitchen, but Kitty Gilbert was still there, finishing the last tasks of a ranchwoman's day. She straightened her back from stooping over the stool by the stove where her bread sponge was set. She had been spreading a clean apron over the pan. Kansas noted the flour on her hands and forearms. His face darkened with displeasure.

"Where's Flapjack?" he demanded.

Kitty laughed. Her laughter always made him think of the brook beyond the cottonwood tree.

"He nodded off to sleep while I was washin' dishes," Kitty replied, "nodded right off to sleep with my dish-towel in his hand.

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So I sent him to bed. It wasn't no task to stir up this bread. It ain't a big lot. The men leave to-morrow, you know."

Kansas moved over to the table and dropped into a chair, a chair that he tipped on its back legs that he might set his shoulders against the wall; and presently Kitty came to sit beside him. She must hear all about the trip to Bonanza, the new excitement of the disappointed oil prospectors, the gossip of the store. The light of the lamp concentrated beneath its paper shade fell full on her as she sat, and it seemed to Kansas as if he were looking at her for the first time. He wondered just when those faint wrinkles had been penciled at the corners of her eyes, and the dark shadows beneath them. Her reddened work-worn hands were clasped in her lap, and her white wrists seemed almost transparent in contrast. Through the gingham of her dress her shoulders and knees showed in angular outline.

"God! How thin you are!" he said, voicing a thought and scarce knowing he spoke aloud.

Kitty looked up, startled. He had been talking of the stage-driver, and the interruption was incongruous and complete. Now he brought the chair down on all four legs and leaned toward her, elbows on knees, big hands twisted together.

"What would you say, Girl," he asked her, "if I saw a chance to get you out of this hard work that's makin' you old before your time? Wait!" for Kitty had started to speak. "Supposin' it meant more work than ever for a year, maybe two years, but things easy after that for all your life."

"I ain't complainin', Bob," she broke in. "I don't mind the work. When it's for you I like it." A faint rose of embarrassment stained her tired face.

"If it meant I had to go away, what would you say?"

Kitty's eyes widened.

"Are you thinkin' of the Klondike?"

"It ain't the gold I have on my mind, Kitty. I've an idea I couldn't be lucky with gold. It's horses."

"Horses!" she echoed.

He nodded.

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"They brings four hundred dollars a head in Dawson. But I'd have to be away a year, maybe two. What would you say to that?"

Kitty searched his face narrowly, then slowly her transfiguring smile dawned in her watching eyes.

"If you're sure of the fortune you're seekin' and your heart is on the road, I wouldn't be the one to hold you at home."

Kansas rose suddenly, for his eyelids were stinging. When he spoke it was gruffly. "I ain't gone yet," he said.

But far into the night as Kitty lay beside him, listening to his even breathing and trying to reason away the fears that crowded in upon her, she knew for a certainty that he would go. And in the morning came Slim riding up the trail from Bonanza and shouting as he came. He burst into the kitchen where Kitty was alone, for Kansas was outside paying off the round-up hands.

"Howdy, Mis' Gilbert. Did Kansas tell you about the Klondike gold mines you got walkin' around the upper range here?"

Kitty smiled at him.

"Seems like folks must be crazy to pay that much for horses. I'm only afraid it ain't true."

"Well, maybe they are crazy," conceded Slim, "but it sure is true. See here!" And he would have spread out his Klondike guide, but Kitty begged him to wait for Kansas who was coming up the walk from the corral.

When the two men were seated at the table with the guide open between them they drew her into their talk. All three pored over the map of the Edmonton Trail, and Flapjack Charlie, the young round-up cook, who had come in to return the Dutch oven, lingered to look over their shoulders.

"You see," explained Slim, "I'm meetin' a coupla men in Billings, and we'd go north from there to the border and cross here," he pointed to the map, "near Fort McLeod, and then if we wanted we could take the railroad to Edmonton."

"And there's a trail, Kitty, the rest of the way," put in Kansas.

"Even if they is a trail, it would sure be shut by now with the heavy snows they must have up there," Kitty expostulated. "You'll have to wait till spring."

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"Excuse me, ma'am," said Slim. "But the book says winter is the best time to travel up there. The country is marshy, you see, ma'am, and in the winter it's froze solid, so you can go anywhere. If we start now we'll be in Dawson by spring."

The talk went on for hours. Plans were made, revised, remade, took final shape. Kansas was to round up the horses.

"I'll need extra hands for that."

"Won't I do for one, boss?" Flapjack Charlie had spoken for the first time and the older men looked him over. "I can cook for you. I guess you could use a cook."

"Who's this hombre, Kansas?"

"He's a hard-ridin' cowpuncher that can throw the best flapjacks in the state of Wyomin'. Mr. Jackson, meet Flapjack Charlie Peterson. He's a Swede, but he sure can cook."

"That so?" queried Slim. Then he turned to the boy. "You're hired. If you have an outfit you'll get wages paid in Dawson when we sell the horses. If you ain't got an outfit you works for your share of the grub."

"That goes with me," retorted the boy. "I ain't got no outfit but my bed and my horse, without you count in my pay for the round-up here; but I'll sure work. When do we start?"

"How much time do you need to round up them horses, Kansas?" asked Slim.

"You might give us four days. I'll get the Lumans from across the creek to help me."

"All right. I'll meet you at the Big Five in Bonanza on Tuesday with the tents and grub enough to take us to Billings."

"And we'll be there," said Kansas, "with the horses. And a grub-wagon."

There followed four strenuous days. Kansas and Flapjack Charlie were out with the first faint dawn, scanning the slopes of the upper range for the grazing herds. As soon as the two Lumans appeared from the ranch across the Medicine Lodge they rode off, leaving their neighbors to guard the outlet of the valley and to turn whatever horses they might capture into the box canyon behind the house where the big corral was open. They moved up

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with caution through the high country, keeping to gulches and depressions of the hills, and working always down-wind from such herds as they might see, for the range horses had all the keen senses of the wild thing, reënforced in many cases by hatred of a remembered toil. They would dodge, double and fight if need be, to avoid being taken.

From the shelter of the nearest hiding-place, Kansas studied the behavior of the leaders of each bunch before he gave the orders for the attack. Where the drive was short he sometimes suddenly appeared at the head of the draw above the grazing horses with Flapjack by his side, shouting and waving his hat. When the bunch stampeded down the valley he increased their panic by pounding after them with outlandish cowpuncher yells, until they rushed before him and his young helper with a single-minded forward motion that carried them into the box canyon before they could sense that they were trapped.

These tactics, however, could only be used where the lead-horses might be thrown into confusion by noise. There were other times when the first sound caused the group to scatter, when the whole herd seemed to melt away among the cedars and the rocks. Then the play was to give them a chance to escape—but only in the direction of the ranch and the corral—to allow them to bunch again, and then with a gentle but persistent disturbance in their rear to crowd them always down the sloping country to where the Lumans were waiting. Yet again it was a battle of wits which Kansas and Flapjack must win by the sheer superiority of their riding. They had to head off the flying horses by always being on the upper side of the hill and first at every lateral gulch or draw. It was a game to which the sagacious cow-ponies were well-trained, but in which they were handicapped by the weight of the riders they carried. More than once Roman Nose missed his footing and horse and man slipped, slithered and rolled to the bottom of an incline while the band of wild horses, alive to their advantage, charged through the opening and away. Flapjack's mount fared even worse, and having lamed himself toward evening of the first

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day had to be replaced by another horse from the boss's string of saddle animals.

There were times when the range horses turned on their tormentors, rearing and lashing out with murderous hoofs, when it was a near thing as to which should be the driven, and when only the reënforcement of the Lumans at the foot of the mountain turned the herd into the big corral. But madly rushing, or dispiritedly jogging, or screaming and rearing, as the case might be, by bunches of twenty-five and thirty the wild horses were gathered in, and Kitty standing on the ranch-house porch tried to count them as they flashed through the corral gate. Thirty, fifty-five, eighty, a hundred, two hundred by nightfall of the third day.

Kansas and Flapjack, working alone, cut out of the motley collection the horses that seemed fitted to the long, hard trail ahead, all young animals, of short sturdy build, with wise faces and minds of their own, and among them some whose coats showed signs that they had been under pack or saddle before. As each horse was chosen it was driven into the small corral and when the selection was complete the unwanted remainder were turned loose to seek the hills again. At the end of the fourth day seventy-five head of picked stock were ready for the march. The two men were elated when they came in to supper, and their elation colored the talk after the plates were emptied and shoved aside. Kitty lingered to listen, for once leaving the dishes unwashed. There would be time enough for dishes, she thought with a pang, when the boys were gone.

"Just what do you figure, boss, is the Klondike worth of them horses we got in that there corral?" asked Charlie.

"I can't say down to the last four bits, Flapjack, without a paper and a pencil and a hell of a lot of hard work. The big boss here," and Kansas smiled at Kitty, "she probably could tell you exact, but I expect there's considerable over twenty thousand Klondike dollars a-trampin' around out there."

"That's five thousand dollars a day. Not bad wages for two men, is they, Mis' Gilbert?"

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"You haven't collected 'em yet," remarked Kitty drily, and they all laughed.

The cold light of dawn touched the top of the Medicine Lodge Cliff with silver, but night still hung undisturbed in the hollow where the ranch-house stood, and Kitty had to light her lamp when she prepared and set out her last breakfast for her man. Her heart felt like a hollow bell ringing and ringing with every beat—the last, the last. But her pale face was cheerful, as she bustled between the table and the stove. There would be time enough for mourning, she told herself sternly, when the men were gone.

Breakfast was over and Flapjack was harnessing the team. He would drive the camp wagon and Kansas on Roman Nose, with the two Lumans to help him as far as Bonanza, would herd the horses down the valley. Kansas lingered in the kitchen.

"I've left you money in the chest, Kitty," he said. "I think you'll find it more than what you'll need. Luman will run our stock with his, and I'll be back— You have an account at Hyattville, and I'll fix one for you at the store in Bonanza before I leave."

"I'll be all right, Bob, don't you worry."

He reached up a finger and caressed her cheek.

"I'm doin' it to get you out of all this, Kitty."

"I know you are," she answered simply.

They looked at each other, struck mute by the immensity of the feeling between them. Then they moved out into the dawning, hand in hand.

Hazing seventy-five wild horses down the trail with only three riders was slow work. They camped for the noon where the irrigated land met the desert west of Hyattville, and it was in the face of the sunset that they thundered down the steep road and over the bridge to the Bonanza flats. Slim was on the watch and came galloping to meet them with two of the Jackson riders. Then it was an easy matter to drive the unruly herd through the street of the town, and into the Jackson home pasture for the night.

All Bonanza turned out to see them start on Tuesday morning, the camp-wagon with Flapjack Charlie at the reins, the extra saddle horses trotting sedately behind the wagon, and the range

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horses with their wild eyes and shaggy coats kept in a semblance of order by a guard of the Jackson ranch riders. Slim and Kansas brought up the rear, hazing the strays out from between the buildings, herding them after the others.

On the steps of the Big Five a group was gathered. There was Barkeep Jim with a towel in his hand, a towel that he brandished while the stage-driver waved his hat, and the oil drillers shouted confusedly. Slim and Kansas drew rein.

"See you in Dawson, boys," said Slim. "We'll sell you some of these horses if you ever get over the Chilkoot Pass."

"That is, we will if you strike a mine rich enough to pay for 'em," added Kansas while the prospectors jeered.

Barkeep Jim forced his rotund form to the front of the crowd, a flask in each hand.

"There'll be plenty on the road, I suppose, but a little from the Big Five may go good now and then," he explained. "Or you might save 'em till some time when you need 'em."

"We'll sure do that, Jim," said Kansas, "and then we'll think of you."

"Well, so long, good luck!"

"So long, cowpunchers!" cried the tall billiard player.

Slim regarded the speaker mournfully.

"I never did expect an oil man to know straight up," he remarked gently, "but you would think even a teethin' baby could recognize that these here critters is horses and not cows. Mc and Kansas aims to be impersonatin' horsewranglers."

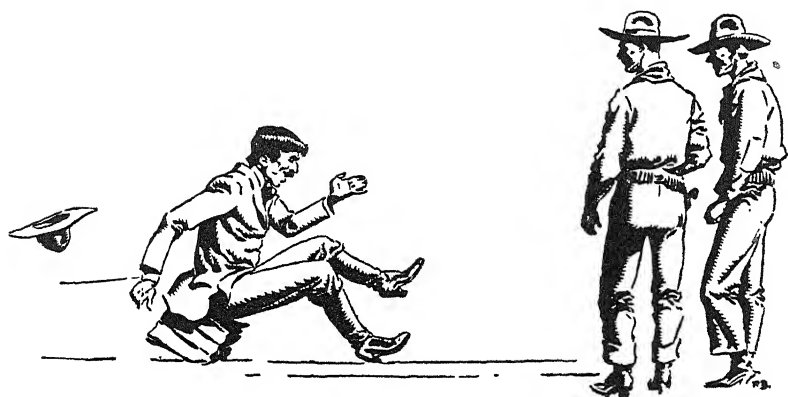
Crestfallen, the billiard player tried again.

"Well, so lon . . ."

"Likewise," asserted the stage-driver, "'so long' ain't no proper send-off for a Klondiker. You should tell 'em to 'mush along.'"

And joyously the crowd took up the cry.

"Mush along, horsewranglers! Mush along!"



Chapter II

THEY TRAIL ACROSS MONTANA

FLAPJACK CHARLIE was making camp. Beyond the belt of cottonwoods Shell Creek could be heard chattering noisily over the shallows of Kettle Belly Crossing. Full daylight rested on the Rim Rock of the Big Horns and spilled down into the forked canyon where Shell Creek issued from the hills, but the rosy shadows were gathering on the sagebrush plain, and above the hidden valley of the river the night mist was already rising.

The camp-wagon had been drawn up to the sheltering edge of the cottonwoods, the lid of the grub-box on its rear let down and supported as a table by its stout peg-leg. Near it the young cook moved about his fire dodging the shifting column of aromatic smoke, and sending a lanky shadow out to the roped bedrolls surrounding it. The Dutch oven with the biscuits in it he had almost buried in the bed of the fire. Now he set the blackened coffee pot tilting beside it on the coals, and lifted a skillet of simmering canned tomatoes to a balancing perch on its cover. On the grub-box table a slattern flour-sack with gaping mouth still showed the hollow left by his bread mixing, and slices of bacon lay ready for the frying-pan. The preparations for supper were complete.

He extracted a tomato can full of boiling water from the coals and carrying it between two sticks poured the contents carefully down the hole into which a rattlesnake had slid when he had flung

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out the bedrolls from the wagon. With sticks poised for action he waited for a reappearance of his victim, but seeing that the snake preferred to remain below the surface he blocked the entrance of the hole with a cake of dried gumbo, tamping it in securely with his heel. This done, he stood erect listening for the rumble of the oncoming herd, but there were no sounds save those made by his own team, contented munching where Jack was browsing, grunting and thud of hoofs where Jerry rolled to ease his hide from the day-long pressure of the harness. With a sigh of impatience Flapjack returned to the fire.

"Them horses is sure ornery!" he thought, remembering how furiously Kansas and Slim had been riding all day, ever since the boys from the Jackson ranch had turned back on the bench above Bonanza. The drive had been across a familiar range and the horses had tried to escape through every gully and draw to the freedom of the hills above. When the boss and his partner had headed them in front they had leaked out from the side and it had been mighty slow work getting them along.

Darkness fell and the moon changed from a wisp of cloud to fire while the cook sat on his heels, keeping his blaze alive with bits of sagebrush from the pile he had gathered. At last his straining ears caught a low murmur of sound, the distant drumming of many hoofs, and with it the lilt of a song of the Chisholm trail. Slim Jackson was always a great one to sing.

"Guess he's forgot he ain't a cowpuncher," marveled Flapjack, as he put his bacon in the frying-pan, and shoved it forward to the fire. "That's sure a cowman's song."

But when the first of the herd appeared on the edge of the bench and came pouring down to the flat by the creek, the words which the riders were using rose lustily above the din, and the cook grinned as he listened to the horsewrangler's version.

"Whoopee ti yi yo, git along, you wild horses!

'Tis your misfortune and none of my own.

Whoopee ti yi yo, git along, you wild horses!

For you know that the Klondike will be your new home!"

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A wild whoop which terminated the ballad announced that Slim and Kansas had seen the fire. Flapjack waited while they hazed the last strays over the crest of the bench, then he set his hand beside his mouth.

"Come and get it!" he bawled, a summons to which the riders responded with joyous yells. They sat on their bedrolls and ate, too busy to talk until hunger was appeased. Then they smoked and gazed with half-closed eyes into the red heart of their fire.

"Them horses seems kind of quiet, now," remarked Flapjack.

Slim snorted. "They ought to be. We sure run 'em for the last two miles. I hope damn well they never gets their breath."

"How did you get them started straight along?" asked the boy curiously. "When I passed you this afternoon they was all dodging sideways."

"Well, you see, Flapjack," Kansas cut in, with a face that was preternaturally grave, "after we'd wasted a lot of time a-headin' 'em down and a-roundin' 'em up, Slim here begun to sing. And the very first note of that sweet voice of his was plenty for them horses. They just naturally lit out, and as long as he sang they traveled. We'd a been here by sundown only Slim had to stop for breath every now and again."

Slim evidently considered the implication beneath his notice.

"I expect we'll have to night-herd 'em, too," he asserted morosely.

"You bet! Or they'll be leavin' for the high country while we sleep. I'll take first guard so you can roll in when you like." Kansas rose, stretched and passed out of the firelight, carrying his bridle and whistling for Roman Nose.

Slim unroped his bed and drew off his boots, unslung his cartridge-belt and gun, and crawled between his blankets where he lay in lazy content, watching Flapjack with drowsy eyes. The boy was scouring the grease from his frying-pan with a matted bunch of sage, and swearing softly at his prickly implement.

"This is the time of day when I'm glad I ain't a cook," asserted Slim.

Flapjack straightened his back and smiled.

"And to-morrow mornin' about half past one or two," he re-

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torted, "when the boss calls you out to night-herd them horses, I'll be damn glad I ain't a horsewrangler."

Slim laughed.

"To-morrow night we all ought to get a sleep, for Kansas aims to reach Lovell's and we can throw this herd into the summer pasture there. Even for these ornery devils it shouldn't be more than a day's drive to the ranch from Kettle Belly Crossin'."

"Kettle Belly," mused Flapjack. "That's sure a queer name. Wonder where it come from."

"Didn't you never hear of Kettle Belly? He was a pardner Lovell once had. He come from Kansas City, and the round-up hands was camped here when the Old Man brought him out for the first time. He wasn't more than middle height, you see, but he was all blowed up in front. Seems like the boys never could get over it. Big as Barkeep Jim over to Bonanza he was. It ain't an unusual figure for a barkeep, but in a cowman or even a cowman's pardner it was plumb historic. The least they could do was name the place after him."

"You bet!" agreed Flapjack gravely and picking up the pails he went off to the spring for more water, leaving Slim to go to sleep.

The first ferry the next morning presented them with a choice of routes but Kansas decided in favor of the near side of the river, because the flat there was covered with salt sage which made good forage and also because the harsh rocky sides of the fantastic red badlands crowding in upon the flat would prevent their unruly herd from wandering. With these natural assistants to keep the horses in order they could make good time and before dark they had crossed the river to Lovell's ranch.

Lovell and his young son came riding out to meet them, filled with a desire to hear the truth of the strange project at which rumor had already tantalizingly hinted. When the horses had been turned into the pasture reserved in summer for the saddle-stock, the boy followed Flapjack and the cowpunchers to the bunkhouse where he listened entranced to tales of a Klondike paved with gold and filled with inhabitants who were such unprintable fools that they would part with almost any sum for a horse. His father mean-

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while took Kansas and Slim to the house and all evening the family discussed the adventure from every angle and with complete ignorance of almost every essential involved. Lovell, like Kansas, felt confidence in the enterprise because it dealt in horseflesh rather than in the uncertainties of gold.

Although the horsewranglers made a daylight start, Lovell was out at the corral gate to see them off. With keen eyes he appraised the range horses.

"Kansas!" he called. "Isn't that gray mare lame?"

"She stepped into a prairie-dog hole yesterday, Lovell, but it don't look like she was hurt much. We'll give her a rest in Billings."

"Suppose you leave her where she is. I'll give you one of mine to replace her," suggested the rancher. "No use starting with a lame horse."

But when Kansas saw that Lovell's foreman was bringing up a pony from the boss's own saddle-string he protested.

"Damn it all!" declared Lovell. "I always have a representative at every round-up this side the Big Horns, and this pony is going along to safeguard the interests of my friend, Kitty Gilbert. When you've had your fling in Dawson this horse will bring you home again, Kansas, you old four-flusher!"

There was no possibility of refusal so Kansas accepted the gift with a grin and a corresponding insult.

Lovell's riders saw them across the ford of the Shoshone, the tributary of the Big Horn River that bounded the ranch on the north, and before parting with them the foreman let fall a warning.

"They say Wild Bill has holed up for the winter on Dry Head with a gang of cattle rustlers and horse thieves. You'll probably want to guard your bunch at night."

"Thanks," said Slim, "we will."

They kept a sharp lookout all the way up the grassy valley of Red Creek which wound between the Pryor Mountains and their foothill range, but they saw no signs of the outlaws, even when they passed through Dry Head Gulch, their supposed rendezvous. Their night-guard at Coyote Springs was undisturbed, and their only encounter on the hollowed table-land of the divide, after they

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had skirted the bold shoulders of Crow Mountain, was with a big sheep outfit that they found preparing winter quarters.

The three Wyoming men viewed them with the ill-veiled resentment of those whose interest is in cattle, and although they made their noon camp at the common spring, they threw the herd between them and the offending sight.

"This here's a fine range," declared Slim.

"And it's sure wasted on sheep," continued Kansas.

"Damn woollies!" added Flapjack, and they all felt better.

They sent Flapjack ahead that afternoon through Pryor Gap and down a creek of the same name, with orders to make camp at the sub-agency on the Indian Reservation. Kansas and Slim followed with the horses, but when they came in sight of the government buildings on the flat an unwelcome spectacle met their eyes. A large encampment surrounded the agency enclosure and filled the valley on both sides of the creek. Ranks of dark-tipped tepees stood at attention, their smoke-flaps cocked to catch the prevailing wind. Between the tepees were green wagons with naked bows, children and dogs raced through the temporary streets, and a group of boys on horseback were driving some piebald ponies to water at the ford.

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated Kansas. "Must be ration day."

"Damn the luck!" agreed Slim.

"You hold our herd up here, Slim, and I'll trot down and see what can be done."

Slacking his rein Kansas clattered down the slope to the edge of the Indian camp. Dogs slunk snarling between the tepees, children poised, wide-eyed, eager to watch his progress but ready to fly if this white man should dismount. Roman Nose picked a careful way between fires and parfleches and babies. A long line of men and women were still moving through the open door of the agent's house securing their tickets for the next fortnight's ration, another and longer line tailed out from the porch of the store, where the holders of tickets were drawing their allotted provisions, and a trickling stream of men followed by their women were emerging from a side entrance to form a crowd about a

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harassed clerk who had set up a scales on the shady side of the building and who was cutting up and trying to apportion the carcasses of beef dragged out from time to time. The whole ceremony seemed to be a gala affair, especially for the women. Kansas dismounted at the agent's house, tied his pony to the nearest porch post, and then paused on the step to take in the scene.

The women in the ascending line on the store steps were evidently beguiling their waiting by jibing and jeering at their more fortunate sisters who were returning with their supplies. The common method of carrying commodities seemed to be to knot them up in sections of the blanket, and it was these strange excrescences on the female form that provoked the most unrestrained comment and waves of laughter. One old woman appeared with a sack of flour which she had placed on her back and hitched to position with the inevitable blanket, and now it peered over her shoulder, like an inert, expressionless and extremely white baby. This was enough to set off the crowd, which burst forth in shrill ejaculations, but the old woman was not a whit abashed. Pushing her unbound gray hair back from a wrinkled merry face, she poured out a cackling monologue addressed to right and left, and this with such good effect that comments hushed to silence before her and turned to irresistible laughter in her rear, laughter that was now directed at the victims of her sharp tongue.

Kansas shoved in through the doorway of the agent's house, amid vociferous complaints from the women thus superseded. The Indian men made no comment but silently gave place to the tall cowpuncher. The agent at the pine table at the end of the barnlike room looked up from his work inquiringly. Interruptions were rare on ration day.

Kansas pushed his hat back from his brow.

"I'm sorry as hell to bother you, sir," he began. "I see you have more than plenty to do. But I sure need your advice."

"Now?" queried the agent, indicating his waiting Indians.

"Immediate," gravely replied the other.

The eyes of the two men measured each other silently. Then the agent rose and opening a door behind him indicated the only

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privacy he could offer, the disorderly storeroom filled twice a month with goods needed for the ration issue. When Kansas was inside he closed the door, waved his guest to an upturned cracker barrel and took his own seat on a pile of burlap-covered sacks.

"What can I do for you?"

"I've got a herd of seventy-five head of horses up the trail here half a mile," began Kansas.

The agent whistled.

"We was aimin' to camp here beside the agency, but when we saw you had other guests, I thought I'd better come down and talk it over with you. And I couldn't wait till you got through with your work, because we ought to get to whatever night-camp we have before dark."

The agent nodded.

"This is the last day of the issue," he remarked. "Their camp breaks up to-morrow morning."

"Which means," said Kansas, "that it would be mighty easy for our horses to be run off with the Indian stock? Plumb accidental, of course."

The agent grinned.

"Exactly," he said. Then his face became serious. "I don't see how I could protect you or prevent it if you came here."

He meditated a moment while Kansas watched him.

"I have it," he announced. "There's a good spring and fair feed up Sagehen Creek ten miles. You can keep in the timber around the west end of the valley here until you strike the creek and follow it up. That should put you beyond even accidental contact with the Indians' horses. Most of 'em are pasturing east of Pryor Creek."

"I saw that," said Kansas, "but I think I'll night-herd my bunch just the same."

"Not a bad idea," agreed the agent, rising. "And I'll keep the Indians from the west end of the reserve busy here on some pretext or other until you can get a good start in the morning."

"That's what I call damn white," asserted Kansas.

"Not at all! Not at all! Of course I don't want you to lose any of your horses, but I am even more interested that my Indians

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shan't get into trouble, because," and the agent's eyes rested on the gun at his visitor's hip, "it's hard to explain to Washington when there's been a shooting."

Flapjack was waiting for Kansas outside the agent's house. He had brought the wagon to the outskirts of the encampment, but surmising that the presence of the Indians would make some change in the plans he had not disturbed his load. He had kept his team in harness and maintained a keen watch for his boss. As a result he was ready to take the trail at once to Sagehen Creek. He had made camp and had supper all prepared by the time Kansas and Slim had made their way around with the horses through the timber.

It was Sunday afternoon when they reached Billings, refreshed by a night's rest at the horse ranch on Blue Creek, when the herd had been in corrals and the three men had shared the hospitality of their friends in the big house. Not even the excitement of explaining their venture to new listeners had kept them long out of bed. Now they clattered into town driving the horses to the Davis pasture where Kansas had been accustomed to hold his cattle while waiting for shipment. They might be delayed in Billings a day or two waiting for Slim's friends, his first partners in his Klondike enterprise.

"It won't be no job at all to find them, about as soon as they strikes town," Slim explained. "George Raymond, he's a sorta stout customer with black whiskers all over his face. He's been freightin' for years from here into the Basin, and we ain't likely to see him outdoors without his mare and his six mules. He rides the mare and them mules follows him like dogs. And likewise you can tell him anywhere by his saddle. Got two crossed horns in front of it and two more behind. Like a packsaddle it is, stretched out to make room for a seat. They calls him Packsaddle on account of it. No, it won't be no trouble for you to recognize Packsaddle George. And Big Joe will be with him. He's a Frenchman, and if he ain't the tallest man the Almighty ever made, then nobody has ever saw the rest of 'em."

But in spite of these reassuring distinctions of appearance they

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searched eight days in vain for the stout freighter and his tall French friend. Each morning and evening the three went down to the Davis pasture to make sure that the horses were not up to mischief, but the rest of each day they spent watching the crowd that came and went along Montana Avenue, or examining the saddles on the ponies tied before the shops and saloons. The town was full of cowpunchers in from the fall round-ups, and riotously spending their "time," as they called their hard-earned wages. They stalked along the wooden sidewalk, the thud of their high heels accenting the more sober tread of the Billings citizens. They collected at the bars and around the gaming tables of their favorite saloons, where the commonest topic of conversation was the restriction of their sport made necessary by the recent anti-gambling laws, or they gathered at Yegen's or Linton's fingering gay neck-handkerchiefs and rubbing elbows with Klondikers who were selecting their outfits for the journey north.

Toward the middle of this week of waiting Flapjack had an encounter with one of these Klondikers. The three Wyoming men having finished their lunch were starting out on their afternoon patrol of Montana Avenue. A freakish gust of wind whipping around the corner of the eating house caught Flapjack's hat and sent it sailing out into the middle of the unpaved street. Flapjack and several others gave chase, but the hat propelled by the breeze dodged their snatching hands like a live thing, heading uncertainly down a short pitch that ended in a large puddle. Here it undoubtedly would have come to rest but for the quickness of a passing horseman who leaned from his saddle and caught it up, at the very edge of the mud. The chase and the recovery were both unseen by Kansas and Slim who were accordingly some distance ahead when Flapjack returned to the sidewalk. As he hurried along to overtake them the doors of a poolhall suddenly burst open and a tall man emerged, walking backward and firing a last good-natured jibe at a laughing crowd within. As the stranger stepped down onto the board-walk his boot heel caught in a knothole in the planking, and with a wild lurch he sat down heavily on a

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wooden box of canned peaches that had been unloaded by the poolroom door.

This in itself was not remarkable, but the lurid flow of language that fell from the tall man's lips was sufficiently original to hold Flapjack to admiring attention. In a soft conversational tone he adjured the builders of that walk, the city management and the county commissioners, and from adjuration he passed to descriptions that fell little short of genius. As Flapjack listened he noticed that the stranger was very dark, and as he sat upon the box of canned peaches with long legs cramped he looked unusually tall. Therefore when he paused for breath, Flapjack addressed him.

"Beg pardon, sir, but might your name be Joe?"

The tall dark man surveyed the questioner.

"It might be," he asserted slowly, "if the inducements was sufficient. At present I answers to 'Doc.' But I ain't so committed to it but what I could change." He rose and tried his wrenched ankle gingerly. "That is, as I said before, if inducements was sufficient."

Flapjack grinned appreciatively.

"Sorry, but I guess after all you won't do. You see, I'm looking for the tallest man God ever made. And while I admit that He put in some good practice on you it don't quite fill the bill."

"Well," said the man named Doc, "I got all the growth I aim to have, so perhaps we'd better call it off. If you should change your mind though, you could get me here." He nodded toward the pool-hall. "I'm headed toward the Klondike next week, but I ain't in no ways committed to that neither."

With this, they had separated and Flapjack had rejoined his friends. It was Sunday afternoon before he thought of the man named Doc again. Then he was seated with Slim and Kansas on the rail fence enclosing the railroad park and facing Montana Avenue's line of stores. In a desultory fashion more from habit than from hope they kept their eyes on the loiterers on the opposite side of the street.

The train from the East had just pulled out of the station, life was returning to normal after the one event of the afternoon, and the Indians from the reservation who had been exhibiting

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baskets and blankets on the station platform were moving along the wooden sidewalk or standing watching their white neighbors. The men in feathers or black stetsons and with bright worsted wound around their braids, the women, some with babies on their backs and all with gaudy blankets drawn close about them, made splashes of color among the crowd. A belated group of travelers emerged from the station, among them Davis, the owner of the pasture on the edge of town. Seeing the three on the park fence he stopped and accosted Kansas, a shadow of concern in his eyes.

"Hope you wasn't lookin' to throw your cattle into my pasture, Kansas," was his greeting. "I see from the train it's plumb full of a damn bunch of horses."

"Them's our horses, Davis. We arranged with your big boss, seein' as you was away. She said she didn't know as you cared what sort of a critter ate the grass, so long as it wasn't sheep."

Davis was obviously relieved.

"Thought maybe your fall shipment of cattle was bein' crowded out. If the horses is yours, I ain't got no quarrel with nobody. But how come you're shippin' horses?"

"Ain't shippin' 'em," rejoined Kansas. "Me and Slim here is drivin' 'em."

"To the Klondike," put in Slim.

"They brings four hundred dollars a head in Dawson," added Flapjack in reply to Davis's look of bewilderment.

"We throwed 'em into your pasture," continued Kansas, "while we're waitin' to meet up with friends of Slim's."

"Packsaddle George is goin' to meet us here," said Slim, "him and Big Joe."

"Packsaddle George! Not the freighter?" queried Davis, and then in answer to Slim's nod, "Why, he pulled out over a week ago."

"The hell he did!" ejaculated Slim.

"He sure did!" declared Davis. "I saw him just before I left Billings—must have been on Saturday a week ago. He was in an almighty hurry too. Just blew in town and right out again. Said he had to overtake his partner who was ahead of him."

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"Damn!" said Slim fervently.

"Then I guess we'll be pullin' out in the mornin', Davis," said Kansas. "I'll be down to see you about it after supper."

Davis moved off and the three sat in dismayed silence for a moment.

"We're shorthanded, just three of us, handlin' that herd," murmured Slim.

It was then that Flapjack recalled the man named Doc. He told the others of his meeting with the tall dark Klondiker.

"He didn't sound as if he was tied up to nobody else," he concluded, and as with one motion the three got down from the fence and sought the poolhall. As a result there were four men to herd the horses when they went out from the town on the following day.

From Billings they struck northwest across the rising plains through Fairview and Lavina to the east end of the Big Snowy Mountains, which true to their name welcomed the party with their first snowstorm. There they took refuge for a day in Craig's cabin in the Pass between the Big Snowy and Little Snowy ranges while the horses huddled together in groups wherever they could find shelter behind rocks or trees. With the coming of night the wind died down and in the morning they were able to push on over the divide, for though the lazy flakes were still falling they were melting almost as they fell, and the track could be easily made out through their light covering. Down Spring Creek the trail led the horsewranglers and their herd, through Lewistown and between North and South Moccasin Mountains as through a gate to the valley of the upper Missouri. Watching ranges protected the great plain on every hand. Behind were the Snowies, the ridge of the Little Belts extended to the left, ahead were the Highwoods, and to the north beyond the river the Bear Paws and the Little Rockies with Mt. Hancock and Mt. Garfield shut in the sky.

For four days they traveled up this valley, over rolling grassy country with fine water and plenty of feed, passing the Highwood Mountains at their western end, and crossing the Missouri at Fort Benton. The wild horses were growing used to the idea of trailing

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and except for occasional mischievous side-trips from which they were easily headed back, they trotted demurely along the track of the camp-wagon which always set out some time ahead of them. When they were thus on their good behavior Kansas could ride in advance of the wagon to select the camping places while Slim and Doc came cantering behind their furry-sided charges, and often sang as they rode:

“Whoopee ti yi yo, git along, you wild horses,
For you know that the Klondike will be your new home.”

Beyond the Missouri the character of the country changed, for the way led over a corner of the badlands among gorgeous wind-distorted rocks, broken coulees and dry gulches where the wind raised whirling specters in the sand. It was not until they had passed Maria's River and reached Willow Creek in the shadow of the Sweetgrass Hills that they touched on good range country again. But high on the headwaters of Willow Creek a blizzard swooped down upon them from a darkening sky, with howling wind and a swirl of snow that blinded all sense of direction and drove them stumbling into the enclosure of a sheep ranch where they thankfully took shelter. For a day and a half the storm raged while the men hugged the fire in the sheepherders' cabin and the wise range horses drifted before the wind into gulches and deep canyons of the hills.

When the second morning dawned, clear, still and cold, only the saddle-ponies were in sight of the ranch. Knowing that it would be hard to hold the horses after their hours of freedom, the four men set up a rope corral, and Doc was left in charge to head each bunch in at the opening while the other three scattered among the draws to round up the herd. Toward the middle of the morning they brought in a large band which they had found together in a box canyon. It had been hard work to get them out of the hills, for the leader of the band, a stocky buckskin with an ugly heavy head and an eye lit with evil intelligence, had been well versed in all the devilish subterfuges of his tricky ancestry. When at last the rope corral was in sight and the victory of the horse-

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wranglers seemed at hand, he suddenly turned and with the rest thundering after him dashed toward Willow Creek, which here ran between high cut banks. In vain Slim spurred forward to turn him. Fleet as the cow-pony was, the buckskin devil was faster, and Slim with his mount was caught in the rush. At the edge of the creek the wild horse set all four feet, threw himself back on his haunches and came to a skidding halt, but the few foremost of his followers were not able to stop, and carrying Slim with them they plunged down into the creek, where they promptly sank above their knees in soft mud. The buckskin devil, from the bank above, surveyed their plight and as if satisfied at last turned and quietly trotted with his band into the waiting corral.

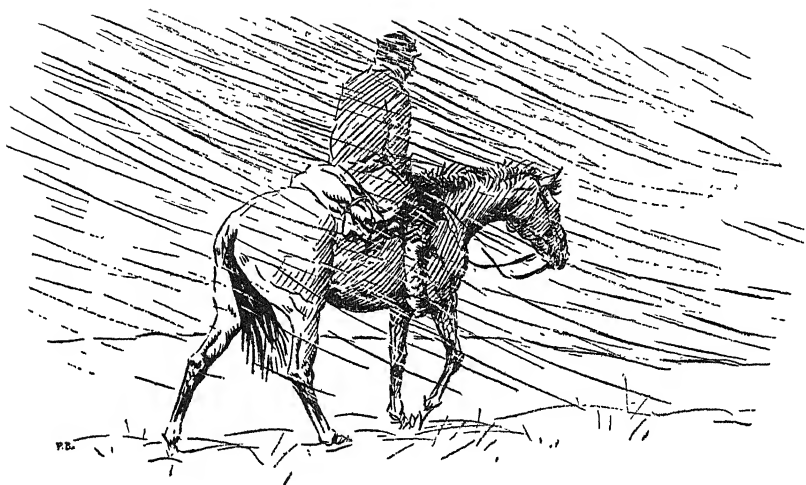
Slim was obliged to dismount into the mud and water, and here Kansas and Flapjack found him surrounded by the mired range horses and scanning the perpendicular bank of Willow Creek with rueful eyes.

"That horse is sure christened," he announced as the two appeared above him, "the Buckskin Devil! We've been holding the ceremony and these here," he indicated his dejected equine companions, "these here is the witnesses."

"Turned Baptist, ain't you, Slim?" queried Flapjack, but Slim ignored the jest.

"Which way is this bank lower?" he asked. "We can't get out here."

But when he had laboriously led his charges to the lowest place they could find, neither he nor the horses were able to scramble out. From each attempt they only slid back more muddy and winded, and it was not until the sheepherders came out with shovels to dig down the bank that the prisoners could be released. But in the end all the horses were brought in, and two days later the full complement crossed the international boundary at Coutts, exactly one month from the day they had left Bonanza.



Chapter III

THEY FIND PARTNERS AND LOSE THEM

THERE was little of distinction to mark the boundary. Two customs houses, the United States and Canadian, stood beside the railroad track connected by a wooden platform, across which a white streak had been painted to indicate the exact location of the Line. The horsewranglers camped by the side of the track for half a day, until the inspector could finish his work with the north and south bound trains; then the horses were counted and when a duty of two dollars a head had been paid, the Americans were free to proceed.

Through the same rolling pasture country they made their way, still bearing northwest, past the station of the Mounted Police on the Milk River divide and down upon the headwaters of the South Saskatchewan with fog and snow for company, slowing their pace in face of a bitter winter wind that finally brought the horses to a standstill on the banks of St. Mary's River. Forced to lie by for a day they wandered into the little town of Lethbridge, where they examined the narrow-gauge track called the "Turkey Trail" lead-

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ing to the coal mines and the main line of the Canadian Pacific at Dunmore.

"Pocket size, ain't it?" exclaimed Flapjack Charlie.

They scanned the neat barracks of the Northwest Mounted Police and approved of the scarlet-coated riders that came and went, and of their horses as well. They stood on the bridge for some time watching the river swirling by below, and Kansas observed that it moved about as fast as their home stream in the shadow of the Big Horns. Flapjack and Slim agreed with him.

Doc was the first to see the approaching cavalcade, but his exclamation drew the eyes of the others. Two of the three horsemen were tall, one in the scarlet tunic and rough-rider hat of the Mounted Police, and the other in nondescript garb which yet served to set off his immense height. Between them rode a stout dejected man on a sedate brown mare, with his hands folded on the crossed horns of his saddle. His hat, pulled low over his eyes, hid most of his face and the rest was masked by the black stubble of his beard; but Slim did not need the identification offered by the six mules that were strung along behind under light packs. He would have leaped forward if Kansas had not held him back.

"Something's happened," he said in a low voice. "Better leave Packsaddle George make the first move."

So the four stood waiting by the roadside viewing the scenery and incidentally the riders with elaborate unconcern. Big Joe saw them and touched his disconsolate companion, and both spoke to their guard who obligingly drew rein. Packsaddle's dejection had vanished as by magic.

"Slim, you old horse thief," he ejaculated, "I thought you was miles ahead of me!"

"You ain't got nothin' on us," rejoined Slim. "We waited eight days in Billings with the same idea in mind. These is the partners I picked for you, Packsaddle," he went on. "Kansas Gilbert and Flapjack Charlie. Doc here joined us in Billings and I don't know if he's committed to us yet. He's only just saw you and he may be feelin' discouraged."

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"If you've knowed Slim as long as they say," said Doc smoothly, "you won't need to be told I welcome a change."

Packsaddle grinned.

"You sure have my sympathy," he said. "Meet Big Joe and my friend Constable Berwick of the Mounted. Slim, you probably think I'm headed the wrong way. I thought so too, yesterday, but the constable thought different and he's quicker than me. Joe here wouldn't fight."

Big Joe showed white teeth in a delighted smile.

"I have leev in Alberta," he stated simply, with a bow to the policeman.

Berwick smiled too in the shadow of his hat.

"I am sure it is only a misunderstanding that can be quickly cleared up," he declared. "But unfortunately Mr. Raymond must return to Coutts in person to explain."

"You see," said Packsaddle George, "I came through there after dark and the custom house being closed, I thought it would be right down unfriendly to get the inspector out of his bed, so I just went on without leavin' my card for Queen Victoria. And you know how women are! But the constable here says she ain't the sort to take offense where none is intended, and he thinks it'll be all right when I go back and tell 'em how it was. Would you boys be willin' to wait here till I get back? How long do you think it will take, constable?"

"Not more than five days at the most," responded Berwick; and he added to the others, "You will find Lethbridge not at all a bad place to stop in."

"Grass is all ate up," said Kansas thoughtfully.

"How's that?" inquired Packsaddle, and Slim took up the explanation.

"We have a herd of horses with us, Packsaddle. Tell you all about it when you get back. I expect we'll have to move, for the pasture is grazed pretty short here."

"There's a good winter range near Fort McLeod on Willow Creek," volunteered Berwick. "You're going to have to stop pretty soon now anyway and wait for the rivers to freeze solid. You

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couldn't choose a better spot for a long camp than the range on Willow Creek."

"That sounds like sense," said Slim. "We'll wait for you on Willow Creek, Packsaddle, near Fort McLeod." And with this agreement they parted.

The horsewranglers had difficulty at Old Man River which was already beginning to freeze when they crossed it, and by the time they had reached the town of McLeod it was even as the constable had predicted. They were quite ready to go into camp to wait for the firm trails of winter without taking into consideration the appointment made with Packsaddle George, and on Willow Creek they gladly pitched cook-tent and living-tent with the wagon for a windbreak to the north. Only once while they waited did a storm make a round-up necessary. For the most part the horses were content to browse and fatten on the excellent feed while the weather turned cold and the ice grew thick on the river.

The freighter joined them on an afternoon of lowering sky and whining wind, and the six sat by Flapjack's stove in the cook-tent to discuss their plans. Packsaddle reported that he and the Frenchman had crossed on the ice of Old Man River, but it had been shaky.

"The ver' firs' chinook," declared Big Joe, "break 'er up again for sure. Better wait now till is leetle longer col'."

Packsaddle snorted.

"How far is it to the next big stream?" he demanded.

"'Ighwood Reeve is about sixty milc."

"By the time we get there it'll be froze hard enough to go on, I'll bet."

Big Joe shrugged.

"Perhaps so, perhaps no," was his smiling reply.

Packsaddle George deftly turned the subject.

"Tell me about them horses," he asked the four, and Slim brought out his guide-book and once more outlined their project.

Big Joe was horrified.

"You goin' into ver' bad country for de 'orse!" he remonstrated again and again in answer to their arguments.

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But Packsaddle, knowing the toughness of the Wyoming range breed, was full of enthusiasm.

"Them horses was brought up in 'bad country,'" he retorted, "and they thrives on it. There ain't no sense in waitin' for more winter, and runnin' the risk of missin' the highest prices that'll be paid for horses in Dawson early in the spring. Just listen to that wind. Two more days of this cold will sure make the ice on Highwood River thick enough for a train of cars, and it'll take us two days at least to get there if we start to-morrow mornin'."

The four agreed with him and before daybreak the reluctant Frenchman was assisting Flapjack to take down the tents, make up the packs and load the wagon. But when all was ready they sat on the wagon-seat for hours awaiting the return of the four who had gone after the horses. The whining wind of the night before had turned warm, and the snow was melting and dripping on every hand.

"Bad business to start in a thaw," said Big Joe, and Flapjack, although he said nothing, secretly concurred.

At last the horsewranglers rode back to report that eight of the horses were missing, among them one of the wagon team. A start was manifestly impossible and with muttered curses from all but Big Joe the camp was once more set up in the shelter of the motionless wagon.

For three weeks the weather played them constant tricks and the delay wore on every one's nerves. There were days when it rained, then it relented and snowed great soft flakes; there were days that were still and cold when the rivers once more formed their bridges of ice, and then the freakish warm wind turned all to mud and water again. The men grew desperate for things to do. They even wrote laborious letters to friends at home. They carried these letters to the post office in McLeod and they wandered from poolhall to poolhall. They visited Fort McLeod, the post on Old Man River beyond the town, where two divisions of the Mounted Police were located, making new friends and pursuing their acquaintance with Constable Berwick in his rare off hours. There were few at the barracks whom they had not already met, for contacts were not

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limited to these visits at the fort. Once or twice a week riders on patrol had been stopping at the encampment on Willow Creek to offer assistance or to ask if the newcomers had any complaints of unfair dealing to lodge with them.

"This is a queer trick you boys have," remarked Kansas to Berwick one afternoon after the third time the patrol had appeared, "ridin' round huntin' up trouble for yourselves. All the frontier soldiers I ever saw before stayed in a fort drillin' and shootin' at targets, and waited for trouble to come huntin' them."

Berwick grinned.

"But we're police, not soldiers," he explained, "and that makes a great difference. Then, too, the Force was established to go in with the first colonists as assistants and protectors when these plains were opened to settlement, and it's our main job still to look after the settlers around here."

"So that's why you ride around the country takin' complaints and settlin' quarrels, fightin' prairie fires, settin' up quarantines, locatin' lost cattle and doin' night patrol to catch cattle thieves without nobody callin' you in."

"That's it."

"They say in McLeod," pursued the Wyoming man, "that a Mountie never counts the odds against him, that you wade into all kinds of mobs alone if you have a duty to attend to, and you usually do it without showin' your guns."

"That's not so hard as it sounds. You see, the mob against us is in the wrong and usually knows it as soon as the police give the men in it a chance to stop and think. They know, too, that the Force plays no favorites and stands no nonsense, so it isn't often necessary to show guns. At bottom, you see, they're really glad of an excuse to stop their mischief."

"That's your way of puttin' it, of course," said Kansas, "but I'm sayin' it damn well takes nerve."

"I bet you take to shootin' when you're after Injuns, though," declared Flapjack.

"We've treated them just as we do the white settlers," said Berwick, "and we've found they act in much the same way."

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"Do you mean to tell me," cried Packsaddle, "that if Injuns had stole a bunch of horses you could get 'em back by talkin' to 'em!"

"I mean to tell you just that," replied the constable. "When Fort Walsh was the headquarters for this district back in the early days a hunting party of Sioux from the American side of the Line reported that all their horses had been stolen by Canadian Indians. The officer at the fort sent an inspector with six men with one of the Sioux as guide, and after nightfall they came to a large camp of about three hundred and fifty lodges—fifteen hundred Indians. The non-com in charge left the Sioux and two of his men in hiding on the outskirts of the camp to carry an alarm to the fort if things went wrong, and then he rode in with the other four. The Indians were having a feast so he had no trouble to find all the chiefs together, and he told them he had come to get the horses that belonged to the Sioux. He had a little argument, of course, but he got the horses and he reported to the inspector that he gave the thieves a lecture and they promised to behave themselves in the future."

"What kind of Indians was those?" asked Flapjack incredulously.

"Assiniboines and Gros Ventres."

"Gro' Vont!" ejaculated Kansas. "Well, I'll be damned! We had them in Wyomin' and found 'em pretty mean fighters. It's hard to believe fifteen hundred of 'em would back down to five men."

"They knew they were in the wrong," persisted Berwick. "You see, we never allowed white men or American Indians to run off their stock, so they just had to play the game."

"I'd sure hate to think you was stuffin' us, Berwick," drawled Slim, as they rose to go.

"But I'm not!" laughed the constable. "You could read the whole thing in the official reports. Leaving so early? Well, I'll be saying good-by for a while myself, for I start east to-morrow with a lunatic who is going to the asylum in Winnipeg."

"Roundin' up lunatics parta your job, too?" asked Packsaddle. "You're a funny lot!"

"You'll get used to us after a bit," the constable assured him,

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"for you'll find us doing about the same things wherever you go."

After the departure of Berwick the horsewranglers took up wandering in the town again to pass the time. There were two wrecks on the railroad, one where a freight train went through a bridge and lost four cars in the river, and another where two trains had collided, resulting in the death of a fireman and one other. They visited the wrecks. With surprising promptness there was a trial of the crews of the three trains, and they attended the sessions of the trial, except on days when intense cold kept them huddled about the eating-tent stove. Always they watched for the weather to settle, and occasionally they rounded up the horses to keep track of the count and of their condition.

One evening Doc and Kansas returned to the tent from a day's hunting their stock to find Slim and the other three back from the usual round in town. Flapjack was making the griddle-cakes for which he was justly famous and they all gathered hungrily around their improvised table. Presently Packsaddle spoke with a full mouth.

"Berwick's back."

"That's not bad news," said Kansas. "What did he have to say for himself?"

"Not much. I guess they kept him pretty busy. He's brought back reënforcements for the post. Three of 'em is rookies, but one's a transfer from back East somewhere. Looks like a competent fellow, too. Mellington, they calls him and—"

"Mellington!" exclaimed Doc sharply; then noting the arrested attention of the others he added, "Ain't that the name of an English dook?"

"Sufferin' coyotes!" laughed Flapjack. "You better go back to school, Doc. That fellow's name was Wellington."

"So it was, boy," replied Doc easily. "I'd a remembered that too, if I was fresh out of school."

The slight emphasis on the word "fresh" turned the laugh on Flapjack as it was meant to do. Doc's voice was casual as was his attitude, yet Kansas noticed that the knuckles of the fist that lay

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on his knee slowly whitened with pressure. He looked again at Doc's unconcerned face and wondered.

There followed three more days of storm that further delayed their departure. Each morning Doc scanned the sky and the snow-filled air and cursed, yet he seemed no longer minded to go with the others to town. The only time he left camp was one afternoon when he went out on the range to check the horses which were drifting with the storm, and then he was gone so late that he missed the visit of the police patrol. He cursed his luck in this, too, saying he had meant to lodge a complaint against the weather, but again Kansas wondered.

It was not long before Doc found him alone.

"Kansas," he asked, "how long do you figure we may have to wait here?"

"They tell me at the post," replied Kansas, "that they don't count on being able to get along with a wagon much before Christmas."

"Not before Christmas, eh." Was there a faint echo of dismay beneath the careless tone?

"Look here, Doc," said Kansas. "These ain't your horses, and if you want to move faster than we can, why don't you take your outfit and pull up stakes right now? Who knows if we ever get to the Klondike. Big Joe says we can't, and there ain't no sense in you losin' your chances a-bettin' on our cards. Play your own hand if you'd rather. You know you said when you come with us," and Kansas smiled at the recollection, "that you wasn't no ways committed."

"That was just a manner of speakin'," put in Doc quickly. "I ain't never left a partner in the lurch—before."

"Nor you ain't now. We was damn shorthanded before we met up with Packsaddle, and you sure helped us out. For that reason you're welcome to stay with us as long as you think best. But there ain't no call for you to sacrifice your chances."

"Kansas," said Doc, huskily, "you're damn white. I wouldn't leave you only—"

"Don't you tell me nothin'," interrupted Kansas. "It wouldn't

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be wise. You pull out whenever you choose and I'll fix it up with the boys."

So Doc saddled his horse, adjusted the pack on his mule and set out into a gathering storm, and Kansas reflected that the weather which would add nothing to his comfort would nevertheless obliterate his tracks. But the police did not show the curiosity he had feared when they learned of Doc's defection. Klondiker parties were always breaking up and readjusting themselves and unless called in to adjudicate, it was no affair of theirs.

Flapjack was disappointed.

"I liked that boy," he said, "from the first time I laid eyes on him in Billings. But of course we don't need him now we found Packsaddle. And with all them horses, we will move slower 'n he can."

"I was just a-wonderin'—" began Slim, but under the table he felt on his foot the gentle pressure of Kansas' boot, and whatever his wonder he left it unspoken.

The day after Doc left, Kansas brought a stranger out from town.

"Boys," he said, "this here is Joe LaRose from Edmonton. I've been talkin' with him in McLeod and he was so plumb full of ideas that I've asked him out here to spend the night and to share as many as he can with us. Stir up your fire, Flapjack, and give us a feed, and then we can talk."

Mr. LaRose was indeed full of ideas and ready to share them. He knew about the Edmonton Trail. He had not been out on it himself, and he was not sure just how far it went; but he did know that the mail from Fort Nelson came out over it regularly in the winter, had been doing so for years. In summer, of course, it went around by the rivers. A great number of people were gathering at Edmonton to go to the Klondike, for it was known that the Hudson's Bay Company traders had been accustomed to get around that way, regularly, and with heavy freight of furs and supplies. There must be some sort of road. To be sure he had not heard of horses. It would undoubtedly be something of an undertaking to get them through, but Mr. Gilbert had assured him the horses

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were wild, used to severe cold, to wintering out, foraging for themselves and all that, so they probably would make it all right. But they would have to give up all idea of taking the wagon. Sleds might be used part of the way, but in the end they would have to pack, he was sure.

If he might make a suggestion?

They hung on his words.

He would advise that they ship the horses by the railroad to Edmonton. It would save them exposure and fatigue, they could rest in a good pasture and be in fine shape to take the trail. And while the men were waiting for good traveling weather they could get together their outfit with the advice of people who knew the country and who could save them a lot of unnecessary expense. Edmonton had been outfitting traders and trappers for more years than he could remember.

He also added that if they should want to make any changes in their herd, there were new farms around Edmonton where people were anxious for stock. He knew they could make advantageous deals with any mares they might wish to exchange. The Edmonton horses were a sturdy breed. The farmers sold to the Mounted Police, and surely they knew what that meant. Yes, indeed, Edmonton horses were all right, but they were short of good mares, and his friends would find a market if they were looking for one.

Only Big Joe was unimpressed.

"It's a ver' poor place for de 'orse," he reiterated. "Company traders all use dogs. Me, I don' t'ink de 'orse can leev in dat country, an' I know is damn bad job to get 'im dere."

Mr. LaRose shrugged his shoulders.

"My friend," he said placatingly, "you may be right. But no one has tried wild horses on that trail. I'll grant you a stable-trained horse would not last a month."

"Not a week," declared Big Joe. "Me, I wouldn't take all dis 'erd for one good dog team, no!"

"That's just it," burst out Slim. "You don't like horses, Big Joe, and you ain't lived with range horses like we have. I'll bet

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you anything you care to risk that the Buckskin Devil can go anywheres a dog can."

Then it was Big Joe's turn to shrug.

But the following morning Kansas rode into McLeod with Mr. LaRose. At the station he arranged for stock cars to take the herd to Edmonton. The cars would have to come down from Calgary, the agent explained, which might take several days, but they would be notified when they must be ready to ship. Kansas went back to camp pleased that the decision had been made, and the pleasure was not lessened when he saw Roman Nose, relieved of his saddle, trot over to stand in the shelter of the wagon. The quick ear of the horse had been hearing what he just now detected, the warning moan of the oncoming chinook. Flapjack heard it too, and emerged from the cook-tent, ax in hand, to pound down his stakes. He grinned as he saw Kansas.

"Don't feel so sorrowful over this chinook as you did over the last, do you, boss?" he asked cheerfully.

"Bet your life I don't," replied Kansas. "Boys inside?"

"They're out herdin' horses," declared Flapjack. "Here they come, now."

He pointed to the three riders approaching from the range, but even as he spoke they were blotted from view by a moving curtain of white. The whine of the wind through the tent-ropes rose to a snarl and joined with the full-throated bellow of the hurricane which had swept the snow from the ground for fifteen or twenty feet into the air, and hurled it stinging, blinding, melting against every obstacle in its path. There were moments together when Kansas could not even see Roman Nose, cowering in the lee of the wagon, and the three horsemen were almost upon the two by the tent before either party saw the other.

Through the night at every lull of the wind the trickle and drip of running water could be heard and in the morning the snow was gone. But the wind blew for days. It turned cold and brought more snow, it turned warmer to melt the surface snow to slush, and then became so bitter that the world was a glare of ice. It was bad weather to hunt horses, but the men had it to do, for seven

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head were missing. They came and went through the storms, up-river, down-river. A brown pacing horse was found dying in a gully where he had fallen and had to be shot, two horses were brought in, but four got clear away. Then word came that the weather was too severe for the use of stock cars, but box cars had been substituted and were ready at McLeod. Necessarily the hunt was abandoned.

Snow was falling heavily as the last round-up was made and the bitter wind drove the horses along the road to town faster than Flapjack Charlie could follow with the wagon. The icy road made such bad going for the harnessed team that when they reached the stock-pens half the wild horses were already in the cars. In most cases desire for shelter overcame their fear of the unknown and the process of loading was going forward more quietly than any of the horsewranglers had hoped. Flapjack backed up his wagon to the caboose and swiftly transferred his load of beds and tents, the grub-box and his supplies. The wagon was to be rolled into a box car, the team would go in the car with the saddle-ponies and Packsaddle's mules, and the storm removed all desire to linger over the task.

But the weather which had hastened the departure, proved a hindrance when once the journey was begun. The snow grew heavier and deeper on the tracks, and the freezing wind kept the engine crew from getting up the steam they needed, even while it exhausted the frightened horses in the cold box cars. They crowded together, and tried to lie down. At every stop the engine made to get up steam Kansas and the boys were out coaxing the animals to their feet again. At nine the next morning the train pulled into Calgary, having made less than a hundred miles in eighteen hours. It was useless to think of going further until the storm should moderate.

The range horses tottered through the chutes into the cattle pens. Some were down in one of the cars and were unable to get up at first, and when they finally rose they stood on trembling legs, surveying with indifferent eyes an utterly perplexing world.

Meanwhile the first consideration must be to get hay for fresh

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bedding and fodder. Kansas went with Packsaddle up to the station to interview the agent.

"Hay is pretty scarce," said the agent. "There was a couple of stock trains through here last week that took most of it, and these fellows that came in yesterday evening," he indicated a cattle train lying on the main-line siding, "have bought up about all there was left. You might try some of the farmers. I know you would only waste your time in town."

Slowly the two retraced their steps to their pens.

"Sounds pretty damn serious, don't it?" ventured Packsaddle.

Kansas nodded.

"I'll catch up Roman Nose and see what I can get out of the farmers."

A few minutes later Packsaddle opened the gate of the pen to let the man and horse go through, then closing it carefully behind them he leaned against its bars to watch the rider out of sight. Kansas rode slowly, his head tilted that his hat-brim might protect his face from the wind and stinging snow.

"Roman Nose don't like the idea of facin' that storm," observed the freighter. "Can't say as I blame him neither. Do you?"

The question was addressed to one of his mules which had come up and nudged his shoulder. The mule's face was frosted by his own breath and he rubbed it against his master. About the enclosure the range horses huddled in miserable groups. Packsaddle and his mule observed them sadly. Suddenly the mule's long ears pricked forward. He saw something on the road. Packsaddle turned. A large wagon loaded with hay was going slowly by. The mule nudged the man sharply.

"I know," said the freighter. "I got your idea the first time, but you see that ain't our hay."

He climbed to the top bar of the fence and perched there where he could watch the hay-wagon on its way. The main-line cattle pens were hidden by the nearer bulk of the station building, and as the farm-wagon disappeared from view Packsaddle's eyes narrowed meditatively. It was cold on the corral fence. Now and again he shivered. The others were inside the caboose enjoying

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Flapjack's fire. Nevertheless the freighter remained on his windy perch until a second hay-wagon appeared following the first. Then he jumped lightly down and swung open the gate.

"Here you are!" he called to the driver. "Bring it right in here."

And the farmer obligingly drove in. A shout brought the three from the caboose to help with the unloading which was quickly accomplished.

"Now, boys," announced Packsaddle when the empty wagon had departed, "we're goin' to clean out them stock cars and put this fresh beddin' where it belongs."

"What's your hurry?" demanded Slim.

"Ain't we got all day?" protested Flapjack.

"I ain't bettin' on nothin'," said Packsaddle, "and if you're wise you won't neither." And he moved determinedly toward the nearest cars.

Flapjack's eyes searched Slim's where he read a question and dawning laughter. Then the two seized forks and hurried after their partner. Big Joe muttering about "damn 'orses" sulkily followed their lead.

Two hours later Kansas returned to find the horses contentedly munching and Packsaddle on the steps of the caboose in hot argument with a red-faced man in a gray coat.

"Say, boss," demanded Packsaddle, "you come just in time. Didn't you send us a wagonload of hay about a hour ago?"

"Why, no," replied Kansas. "I've been most to hell and gone, but I couldn't find none."

"This is an outrage," burst out the red-faced man.

"Damn!" said Packsaddle with unction. "Stranger, I'm sorry. You see, Kansas," he went on smoothly, "after you'd been gone about a hour here come a wagonload of hay—"

"The agent saw you turn it in here," asserted the red-faced man furiously. "But he didn't interfere for he supposed, of course, you knew what you were about."

"I thought so too," drawled Packsaddle. "And here it was your hay all the time. Stranger, I'm right down sorry."

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Kansas broke in with genuine concern.

"I haven't an idea where I could get you another load," he said, "but, of course, I will pay you for this one. And if your cattle have not been fed, we have a wagon with us and I'll have the boys fork up all that hasn't been used. It won't be much, I'm afraid, for my horses seem to have made damn hogs of themselves."

At this the stranger appeared somewhat mollified.

"Oh, my cattle have all been fed. We were using these last loads for bedding, and you haven't got enough left to do us much good. You can pay my foreman for the load and we'll call it square. Sorry I bothered you about it. Mistakes can happen to any one, but you'll admit, sir, from our end it looked queer."

"It looks queer from any end, and I don't blame you for gettin' riled," announced Kansas graciously. "I expect I'd a seen red myself. We sure appreciate the way you take it, and if you'll show me where I can find your foreman I'll settle the bill right now."

His only comment when he returned to the caboose a half hour later was brief.

"Packsaddle, you old son of a gun, when we're safe in Edmonton I'll stand you to all the drinks you can hold."

The first one to greet them at Edmonton was Joe LaRose who had been meeting every freight, so he said, since his own return from McLeod. He placed his corral at their disposal. It would not be large enough for a permanent pasture but he hoped they would use it for a few days while they looked around to find what they wanted. They gladly accepted this offer and began unloading at once. It was very cold and the exhausted horses could scarcely be got to move, many had lain down when the cars were shunted off on the siding and three of these were found to be dead. As it would take too long to gather the herd as one, the horses were taken out in groups and Packsaddle drove the first small bunch to the corral of Mr. LaRose. A group of curious idlers followed him as he moved off down the street with ten or a dozen shaggy horses ahead and his six mules trudging dispiritedly behind, but Packsaddle rode as if he were alone. Inside the corral he dismounted, and after examining the bars that he let down to secure an entrance,

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he shook his head in a dissatisfied way. Then he appeared to see the loitering crowd for the first time.

"If there's any of you gentlemen that ain't busy," he said, "I'd be glad of a little assistance."

Several volunteered to help.

"You see," explained Packsaddle, "it would be a right down nuisance to have to take them bars up and down every time we drove in a bunch of this herd. If I could leave the bars down and a couple or three of you men would just stand in the openin' to keep the horses from gettin' out it would save us a lot of trouble. You can see the spirit is all took out of them by their journey. All you'll have to do will be to wave your hats or maybe holler a little."

"We won't let 'em out, mister," said the obliging bystanders, and Packsaddle thanked them gravely.

He mounted his mare and trotted briskly back to the station, while behind him pandemonium broke loose. The six mules had seen him go, and as usual started after him. But the friendly Canadians, determined in performance of their allotted task, flapped their hats and shouted. The mules paused and drew back, considering the situation. Then they charged. More bystanders came to the assistance of the first guard, with more hats and yells, but the mules let fly a barrage of whizzing hoofs that cleared an effective path.

"They walked over them men, hats and all," Packsaddle confessed gleefully to Slim, "as if they wasn't there."

But that was later. Now he came cantering back to his discomfited helpers and busied himself picking up hats and dusting off clothes.

"I should have told you," he drawled contritely, "them mules always will follow me. I'm so used to 'em, I plumb forgot."

The next day with the help of Joe LaRose they found a place to stay. John Allison had a farm about two miles from town, and he was willing to rent his large pasture to the Americans for as long as they might need it. There was plenty of room for all their stock, and half a mile away was the river to supply them with water. All they needed to do was to chop their drinking holes

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through the ice. Once open it would be easy to keep them so with stock watering twice a day. Kansas set Big Joe to making these holes while he and the others transferred the camp and brought the horses out from town.

That task evidently brought the Frenchman to a decision, for after supper in the shack which John Allison had rented them he rose and spoke:

"I t'ink maybe you stay here in Edmonton a long time now, yes?"

"Well," said Kansas, "it will probably take us several weeks to get ready to go."

"All right," said Big Joe. "I ask you let me go now. I don't like this travel wit' 'orses. Too damn slow. Too damn 'ard work. Me, I can drive dogs. 'Ere plenty people want me to drive dogs. I ask to go now."

"That's all right with me," said Kansas. "You can leave any time. But Packsaddle is the one to say. He's your pardner."

"He ain't no pardner of mine," broke in Packsaddle angrily. "I won't never consider myself tied to no quitter."

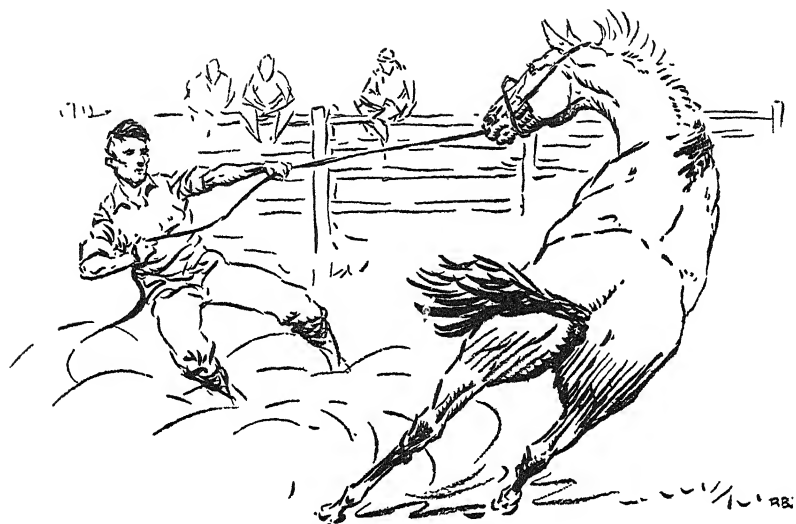
The big man looked down at the freighter for a moment and his harsh face softened strangely.

"Packsaddle," he said pleadingly, "don' be one big fool. Some-time' it's wise man to quit. Dat's ver' bad country for de 'orse."

"What I said goes," replied Packsaddle. "I ain't tied to no quitter."

Big Joe shrugged his shoulders and picked up his roll and his saddle. At the door he paused.

"Wish you good luck," he said, and left.



Chapter IV

THEY OUTFIT AT EDMONTON

IT was Packsaddle George who found the two Wilkinsons and Andrew Bell. They had arrived in Edmonton with an outfit too meager to permit them to attempt the northern trail alone. Packsaddle was returning in the grub-wagon from the mines with a ton of coal which he had purchased for seventy-five cents, and in some way he learned of their situation. After a talk he laid a plank across the top of the coal and brought them out to the shack on John Allison's place and presented them to Kansas and Slim.

"Boys," he said, laying a hand on the shoulder of the elder Wilkinson, "here's a man as can build sleds and boats or rig a raft, and mend boots or harness. His son has been punchin' cows for the 101 Ranch. They all comes from Montana, and ain't been known to shy at critters on four legs."

"We ain't got no outfit to speak of," said the gray-haired Wilkinson, "but I think you'll find we can work for what we may eat. Mr. Raymond said you are rather short-handed."

"We were," corrected Slim, "this mornin'."

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"Oh," said Mr. Wilkinson. It was obvious the three were disappointed.

"But it looks," continued Slim, "as if we was fixed up about right now."

"That is," added Kansas, "if Packsaddle has described you men correct. We haven't any of us got much of an outfit, but we're herdin' a bunch of wild horses, and we aims to work out what we may need. So you can start even with no favors asked. Your grub will be your wages."

"That suits me fine," declared the elder Wilkinson.

"You bet," agreed his son.

"Same here," added Andrew Bell, and the partnership was considered to be formed.

They sat late around the table, discussing the guide-book, the trail before them and their line of action.

"Slim and me and Packsaddle, with Flapjack when he ain't otherwise employed, will be responsible for the horses," declared Kansas. "Trainin' and tradin'."

"Then Andy and my boy Billy and me," asserted Wilkinson, "we'll fit out the sleds and harness and all such things as we need."

"Fair enough!" said Slim, "and we'll work together on big jobs to save time."

"The first thing we got to do, Slim," went on Kansas, "is to pick out of this herd the horses that we know now won't stand the trail. We'll trade 'em off for feed and our own grub, and we'll sell a few to buy our outfit. The rest we got to break to drive and pack."

"Ain't you goin' to want a corral for that work?" inquired Wilkinson.

"We sure could use one," answered Kansas.

"Then if you can give us a lift for half a day, we'll put one up for you," declared the elder man. "In return we'll help you with your round-up. I ain't much of a rider myself, but the boys is handy with a rope. I can be lookin' to find out where we can get birch poles for the sleds. Then I have to go back to Calgary and

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get my carpenter's tools. I didn't think I'd need them when I left there."

Two days later the seven partners rode in to Edmonton. Flapjack and Dad Wilkinson were in the wagon which they were bringing to town to trade off for some bobsleds. The corral was finished and the errand was being made an excuse for a general celebration. They left the wagon in the yard beside the store where they also hitched the team, now harnessed to the new bobsled, and fastened their ponies to the tie-rail. With the resignation of old custom the horses sagged into positions of comfort. They knew they would have a long wait.

Flapjack, replendent in a new neck-handkerchief, led the way along Main Street until he came to the open space beyond the railroad station and the stub end of the tracks. Here he paused and looked both ways down the vista of wooden sidewalk.

"Only two hotels!" he remarked discontentedly, "and no bars except in hotels. This is a hell of a town for a celebration!"

"There's four more in the Old Town across the river," volunteered Dad Wilkinson, "and another on the flat where the road comes up off the ice of the river."

"Four and two is six and one's seven," drawled the young cook. "Seven bars, seven men. Looks like a leadin' of Providence to me. Each man has got to blow the rest in a different one of them seven bars."

"I choose this first one," said Packsaddle promptly. "Step in and name your poison."

Several hours later they stepped out of the bar of the Victoria Hotel in the Old Town of Edmonton, a heightened gravity in their demeanor, a premeditated carefulness in their gait alone bearing testimony to the depth of their potations. Three lanterns, hung in a row, illuminated a painted cloth sign that was stretched between poles in front of a vacant lot opposite them.

"Perhaps we ought to read that sign," suggested Andy Bell.

The rest agreed it might be wise, but none was able to accomplish the feat. After a parley they stopped a small boy who was

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hurrying by with a bundle under his arm. Andy Bell was still the spokesman.

"Son," he said, "me and my friends here find we all of us left our glasses out to the ranch. Would you be so obligin' as to read that sign?"

The youngster looked the seven horsewranglers up and down and gave a grunt of disbelief; but he read the sign while the Americans solemnly listened.

"'Get your Christmas Turkey Free' it says," he told them. "'Turkey Shoot Thursday Evening. Admission, Twenty-five Cents.'"

"That all?" asked Andy.

"That's all," replied the boy.

"Don't seem like enough," muttered Andy, still holding the lad by the shoulder and scanning his face as if he might have some solution to offer.

"Christmas!" ejaculated Kansas. "Damned if I hadn't forgot it would be Christmas on Saturday! Only two days off."

"And we ain't got no turkey in sight," suggested Flapjack.

"Thursday evening," repeated Slim. "Better ask the boy what evenin' this is, Andy."

"I know without askin'," rejoined Andy. "This Thursday, ain't it, son?"

When the boy had admitted that it was, they let him go. Next they pooled their resources and finding they had the requisite amount they were about to cross the street, when Billy Wilkinson voiced a disturbing thought.

"Ain't we pretty drunk to get into a shootin'-match?" he inquired.

They looked each other over.

"Kansas," asked Dad Wilkinson, "how drunk are you? Could you hit a target?"

"Depends on how far away it is," he said.

"That's right," they all agreed, and they went inside the enclosure to see how far away the targets might be.

Some were evidently reasonably near, for the first load that the

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new bobsled carried to the ranch was the weight of five turkeys they had won. The prizes were thrown into the coal shed where they would be away from the heat of any stove, the horses were turned out, and the seven men stumbled to their beds where some crawled in without even removing their boots.

They made a late start on Friday. About noon Dad Wilkinson set out for town to learn where they could cut birch for their sleds, and the others with lariats swinging in a desultory fashion, mounted their ponies to begin the process of breaking the wild horses. Through the afternoon the pasture fence gradually became lined with onlookers, passing men who stopped to watch the fun.

The horsewranglers were working in pairs, Kansas with Flapjack, Packsaddle with Slim, while Andy Bell and Billy rode singly ready to help where most needed. They had brought a small group of horses into the new-made corral, and Kansas and Packsaddle each rode into the bunch and cut out a horse.

Kansas had selected a young sorrel which he herded over toward Flapjack. The boy was waiting with his lariat coiled in his hand and held beside his hip. A sudden lightning-like move and the rope shot out, low, parallel with the ground, to settle around the sorrel's forelegs. Lovell's cow-pony, that Flapjack was riding, felt the shock and threw himself back upon his haunches. The sorrel, checked in mid-run, fell sidewise to the ground, where Flapjack held him by his taut rope. Kansas, dismounting, flung himself on the prone animal's neck, adjusted the headstall, attached the end of the halter to his own lariat, and mounted again. Roman Nose of his own accord took up the slack, and Flapjack relaxing on his rope allowed the sorrel to scramble to his feet. The horse, indignant, attempted to shake the offending halter from his head, he pawed at it, he knelt and tried to rub it off on the ground. Then he tried to run away from it. Still Roman Nose kept pace with him, drawing nearer as Kansas shortened the lariat's length. Andy Bell and Billy kept him from reëntering the bunch, and at last he tired of the useless struggle and slowed to a walk.

Kansas led him up and down with the halter now in his hand, talking the soothing horse-talk of the born bronco buster. At

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length the man dismounted, still leaving Roman Nose attached to the sorrel by the loosely swinging lariat and took the halter in his hand. He walked now and led the horse, dancing and nervously flinching at his nearer approach, but growing accustomed to the strange two-legged creature's gentle control. They stopped. They started again, urged at first by a light slap on the haunch from Flapjack, at last in response only to the voice.

Then Kansas loosed Roman Nose who wisely trotted out of range and stood looking on, while the man and the sorrel horse walked slowly up and down. Once or twice the sorrel made the beginning of a break for freedom, but the man's voice checked him, and Flapjack, Billy and Andy were always in his way. They crowded him into a corner where Kansas took off the headstall, keeping an end of the halter in a noose about the horse's neck. Moving quietly and keeping up the hypnotic flow of his talk, he put the headstall back again. He did this a number of times until the sorrel learned there was nothing painful in the process. Then he signed the guarding riders to fall back a little, to allow the sorrel to move about unbridled in a limited space. With wisps of hay he coaxed him close and patted and stroked his neck. The wild horse now could tolerate his touch, and permitted him to adjust the headstall as he would.

Finally Kansas led him to the corral fence and tied his halter there. The horse promptly drew back upon the rope.

"No, my beauty," said his trainer. "There ain't no use in that. When you're tied to a fence you stand. Whoa, you grass-biter! You understand? Whoa!"

The range horse checked to the now familiar signal, and Kansas praised and petted him. In a few minutes he had the idea. Kansas now put him through all his paces, turning him loose, catching him, putting on the halter, leading him up and down and tying him to the fence. He performed perfectly, if still nervously, all that the man asked of him. Then Kansas let him go.

Packsaddle's horse was being taught to accept the adjusting of his headstall, and the freighter had him in the farther corner of the corral. The six mules, attracted by their master's voice, had

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come up to the pasture side of the fence and were surveying the process with solemn attention. The range horse was completely under the freighter's domination and passed through the last stages of his training quickly. By nightfall, six horses had been broken to lead.

Flapjack had left the training corral some time before the rest, and a welcome plume of smoke decorated the end of stovepipe that protruded from the roof of the shack, as the tired and hungry men turned out their horses and came lugging in their saddles. Suddenly yells of rage from their cook burst upon the air. Flapjack was executing strange maneuvers by the coal-shed door. They hurried to him.

"Hogs!" he shouted. "Allison's hogs! Where are they? I'll kill the whole stinkin' lot."

They surrounded him.

"Now, Flapjack," they said soothingly, "this ain't no way to behave on Christmas Eve. Santy Claus might hear you. What you got against them hogs?"

"What have I got against—" Flapjack became speechless. He could only point to the coal shed, and they all peered in. On the heap of coal was a wet stain or two and a few feathers. The turkeys were gone, and the sharp-pointed tracks around the coal shed told the tale.

The men stared at each other aghast.

"And we invited four of them boys from town to Christmas dinner," added Flapjack bitterly.

Kansas heaved a weary sigh.

"Looks like I can't turn in as early as I planned," he remarked.

The others looked at him inquiringly.

"I'm goin' in to town after supper and I'm taking my dice. Christmas Eve every one ought to be celebratin'. There was an amazin' lot of birds give out as prizes for that shoot. If I can just get into a game with the right boys we may have turkey after all."

Long after midnight Flapjack was wakened from sound sleep by some one pulling at his foot. As he raised himself on his elbow, the cautious voice of Kansas reached him.

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"I got two more turkeys," he whispered triumphantly. "They're hangin' on a nail I drove into the coal-shed wall, and they can't no pigs get at 'em unless they grows wings."

A day or two after Christmas Dad Wilkinson and Slim went out with the bobs and brought in the loads of birch poles that were needed for making the sleds. Then Dad set out for Calgary to settle affairs for himself and his son, and to collect his carpenter's tools. He was gone nearly three weeks. Meanwhile the rest concentrated on the training of the horses. The whole herd was broken to lead and in the process unmanageable and unintelligent animals were noted for exchange or sale. All the horses that they knew they would take with them were taught to carry packs and to drive singly or in teams of two. Kansas had declared they must be interchangeable in all the possible work of the trail. A selected few were broken for saddle use, and these the men rode constantly back and forth to town, saving their own mounts for the strenuous work of the training corral.

The news of exciting doings in John Allison's pasture evidently spread, for the fence was always lined with spectators watching the horsewranglers and their broncos, delighted when the wild horses rolled on the ground in fruitless attempts to scrape off their pack-saddles, or reared and bucked in equally fruitless efforts to dislodge a rider or a flapping ungainly sack of hay. Every day the scarlet tunic of the Mounted Police might be seen in this crowd, and the troopers appeared to be quite as much interested in the conversation of these Americans as in their methods of horsemanship. They came at odd times, even dropping in after dark to chat for a few minutes in the shack, and as they talked, they took in the details of the Yankee housekeeping with quick, comprehensive glances. Kansas and Slim returning one night late from town found a constable in silent contemplation of their corral. They exchanged greetings, but it was some time after the two men had rolled into their blankets before they heard the patrolman move away.

"It sometimes strikes me," declared Slim at breakfast the next morning, "that these police are plumb solicitous about our welfare."

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"They ain't unfriendly," said Andy Bell.

"And their little investigations won't hurt us none," declared Packsaddle.

"Seein' as we have nothin' to hide," added Kansas.

"It really ain't no wonder," concluded Slim solemnly, "that they should think us horse thieves. There's a low-down look about some of you boys—" He was not permitted to finish his sentence.

But after a week or more of this unobtrusive surveillance "the Mounted" evidently reached a satisfactory conclusion in regard to the Americans at John Allison's place, for their visits, if less frequent, were far more friendly, and in the end the horsewranglers received many shrewd suggestions from these "riders of the plains." But the most helpful advice came from a dog-team driver, a bronzed and weather-beaten man whom Billy Wilkinson met in town and brought out to the ranch for supper.

Flapjack apologized for his potatoes.

"They're froze," he said. "At that they're better than some evaporated spuds we tried. And I suppose we might as well get used to their bein' tasteless and watery, for we won't have nothin' else pretty soon."

"You ought to cook them all when you first get them," said the dog-driver.

"How's that?" asked the astonished cook.

"If you peel them and boil them," explained the other, "you can put them in sacks and let them all freeze solid. When you want some to use, you just chop off a hunk with a hatchet, and when it's thawed out, it is as good as when it was fresh."

"Flapjack," said Kansas, "you've got a job all laid out for you. Potatoes was only fifty cents a hundred in town to-day, and you can go in to-morrow and get all you're goin' to need to last us till summer. We'll excuse you from horsewranglin' from now on."

They asked their guest about the trail.

"I don't know it," he told them. "I run the mail down to Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabaska, and I've never been over to the Peace River country where you'll go. I've heard it's pretty difficult as far as the Lesser Slave Lake. Through forest, you know,

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and no feed. But they do get back and forth with ox-carts, hauling the Company's freight. You'll probably make it all right, only you will have to be prepared to feed."

He examined their camping equipment.

"Any one can see you fellows are used to this sort of life," was his approving verdict. "That thing now," he indicated the compact cattle-camp stove, "doesn't waste any heat or any room. By the way, though, you ought to take along some iron rods about eight feet long. You make a gridiron of them on the snow when you camp in the open, to set your stove on. Keeps it steady when the snow melts underneath it. And be sure to brush the snow off your tent roofs every night you're on the road. If you don't it melts with the heat from the inside and then freezes tight to the canvas when the stove goes out. In the morning Paul Bunyan himself couldn't fold up the tent.

"Did your Mounted Police friends tell you to make a 'Hudson's Bay start?' " he asked them just before he left. "No? Well, it's a great idea in this country. Make your first drive a short one, say, from here to St. Albert. Lots of weak places show up on the road that no one could imagine beforehand. If you don't get too far away you can make any changes you need, and save much trouble further on."

By the time the last of the wild horses had been broken and the twenty head that were deemed unfit for the northern trail had been cut out of the herd and thrown into the corral, the horse-wranglers had made many friends in Edmonton. There were men who had come out repeatedly to watch the training who had struck up an acquaintance with the Americans. It had been natural for them to invite the strangers to the holiday dances, for Edmonton people kept open house at such times. Then the friends of Joe LaRose discovered that Kansas could twitch an enticing bow across a fiddle and call the numbers of the old square sets they loved to dance. Overnight the Yankees became in great demand.

They went to dances at houses in town and at the hotel, and even to an affair at Maylett's big ranch-house, where there were

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"sitting-out rooms" furnished with buffalo robes and other fur rugs on the floor, and a wealth of comfortable seats. The entire countryside was invited and came, whole families at a time, from thirty and forty miles around in bobsleds and sleighs, and in the Mayletts' darkened bedrooms the babies were packed as close as they could lie on the beds and even on the floors. Klondikers were still a novelty in Edmonton and the horsewranglers from Wyoming and Montana did not lack for partners.

Men they met at the dances came out to John Allison's pasture to look at the horses, to dicker and to trade, and these told the farmers round about. It was not often that Kansas or Packsaddle had to lead their animals to town, for the town came to them. Klondikers who were arriving on every train, many of them with no equipment at all, came too, clamoring to buy. Even Mr. Maloney from the big place by St. Albert came, and mindful of the dog-driver's advice, Kansas and Slim traded four horses to him for six tons of barley. He liked his four horses so well that he came back and bought ten more for eighty dollars a head.

When Dad returned from Calgary the middle of January his partners had plenty of cash to purchase what equipment he was not prepared to make for them, and they had a picked herd of sixty head, fifty-three horses and seven mules, ready to take the trail. Inexperienced Klondikers were already pushing out from Edmonton, wallowing along under heavy loads through the deep snow, but those who knew the North—the Mounted Police, the dog-team drivers who carried the mail, and the men of Edmonton—assured the horsewranglers that if they wished to bring their herd through they would do well to wait at least until the middle of February, when the snow was heavier and inclined to pack down into a passable road. Meanwhile they could put in their time in preparation. They could not be too well prepared.

The Mounted Police advised them to take along toboggans as well as sleds to use when the snow got too thin and wet for runners. Dad Wilkinson, with Billy and Andy Bell for assistants, made six of these and ten sleds to supplement the bobs they had obtained in the exchange for the wagon. The sleds were stout,

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serviceable affairs with runners and reënforcements of birch, and from the dog-team drivers the Montana carpenter learned the trick of lashing the cross-pieces that formed the platforms to the runners instead of nailing them fast. This gave a flexibility that would be extremely valuable in rough going.

There was considerable discussion about the harness. The custom around Edmonton was to drive sleds with a single horse, but Kansas was convinced that a team of two would certainly be needed to take the loads they had to carry over such a trail as they must expect.

Dad Wilkinson came back from town one night with a good idea.

"Saw a rig to-day," he told the others, "that I think is just the thing for us. A man had two horses hitched to his sled and instead of fastenin' the pole fast, he had it swung on a chain several inches long. Queer lookin' proposition."

"What was the idea?" asked Packsaddle.

"Well, he was goin' over to the Old Town," Dad explained, "and when he started down the bank to the river-ice to cross, that chain went slack, of course. The sled rode right up onto the pole and double-trees, and the whole outfit made as good a brake as any one could want to see. Strikes me that's a good notion for us."

"Could you rig it, Dad?" asked Kansas. "Throw the necessary hitches to make it liable to stand hard knocks, I mean?"

"I sure could."

"Then we'll see you have the chain. How heavy must it be?" And they went into details of the purchases to be made.

Besides the chain, Dad said he would need canvas work-collars with wooden hames, and plenty of rope. He had decided to use rope for tugs, hold-backs and reins, since it would be serviceable when the freight had to be made up in packs while the leather harness, besides being expensive, would then be a complete loss. There was no need to buy packsaddles, he said, for if the others would help him in their spare time, the forty that they would probably need could be easily made.

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There was plenty to keep the men busy, but they still found time for frequent trips to town. They were buying their provisions, a thousand pounds to each man, as the Mounted Police advised, a year's supply to avert disaster due to unforeseen delays. They laid them in early and trained their wild horses by packing the goods out to the ranch. They were wise in being thus forehanded as the Klondikers were coming through the town now in a steady stream, and prices were soaring. Potatoes that they had bought for fifty cents were touching a dollar and a half a hundred now.

They were buying little in the way of personal equipment. Being cattlemen they were all expert campers, and were convinced from what they could learn of the temperatures to be expected that tents and bedding which sufficed for winter in the mountains of Montana and Wyoming would be adequate for their needs. For the same reason they made few additions to their ordinary winter clothing. They laid in extra boots, and the freighter and the Montana men bought snowshoes, since they had failed to bring any from home. By the advice of their Edmonton friends they all got headnets to protect themselves from the mosquitoes which, they were told, would be ferocious in the spring. All but Flapjack invested in the heavy Canadian mackinaws, and all but Kansas got wool-lined leather mittens to replace their cowpuncher gauntlets.

"I'll bet this pair of elkskin mitts I brought from 'Wyomin' will be warm enough," Kansas maintained, "without no wool linin'."

Their own moderate shopping done, they watched with amusement the tenderfoot Klondikers who had loaded themselves down with fantastic Polar outfits, before starting from their homes in the South and East, and who were still frantically adding to their burdens whatever the ingenious traders might suggest. There seemed to be no limit to the foolishness of the tenderfoot.

One day Kansas and three of the others rode in to town to transact some business. They were leading a yearling horse that they had sold to Joe LaRose, and their first stop was at his home.

"Well, well!" was his delighted greeting. "Where have you been

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keeping yourselves? 'Long time no see 'em,' as the trappers say. Did you come in to see the show?"

"We noticed the tent as we come along," said Packsaddle. "Advertisin' Kickapoo Indian Sagwar, ain't they? Any good?"

"Some of the boys went last night," said Mr. LaRose, "and they said it wasn't half bad. Better stay and see it, since you're here. But it wasn't the medicine show I had in mind."

"What then?" asked Slim.

"These Klondikers with the snow engine," declared their friend. "They're trying it out this afternoon. Hadn't you heard about it? No? Well, come with me, and I'll show you something that will make you ready to sell all the rest of that herd of good-for-nothing horses."

They all trooped out in the wake of Mr. LaRose who led them to a field where a thin crowd of curious men were walking about, examining a remarkable outfit. A box car, evidently of amateur manufacture and equipped with broad flat-rimmed wheels, was hitched to a strange engine, somewhat like a locomotive except that it had in front a huge wheel or roller thickly covered with spikes. The four owners were busily stowing the last of their belongings in the box car, but they were obviously very proud of their invention and ready to explain its advantages. They exhibited the interior of the car, with their freight neatly piled at one end and snug living quarters arranged at the other.

"Pretty nice, isn't it?" said their leader.

"It sure is," drawled Kansas. "What you goin' to do about fuel?"

"We're starting with the tender full of coal as you see," explained the man. "And we're picking up a carload at the mines. If that by any chance should not last us all the way to the Klondike, we shall have to depend on wood, of course."

"Oh," said Kansas.

"Of course," added Packsaddle gravely.

"Must have cost a lot of money," observed Slim.

"Well, it did," admitted the man. "The engine alone set us back twenty-five hundred dollars. But we'll earn more than that in the time we'll save in getting to the gold fields. She turns over about

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fifty miles an hour running free, and we figure she ought to develop twenty miles even in deep snow. Perhaps twenty-five."

"That's sure a big savin', all right," agreed Andy Bell.

"It will revolutionize the methods of getting to the Klondike," asserted the owner confidently. "If you want to see her in action come back this afternoon. We expect to have steam up about three o'clock."

The four horsewranglers hurried through their errands and were back in the field at the suggested time. Steam was up and the engine was puffing in a reassuring manner. A portion of the fence had been taken down to allow the train plenty of room to turn into the road, teams were being held up to give it a clear way. The leader was at the throttle in the engine cab. One of his partners was with him in the capacity of fireman, the others were seated in the box-car door.

"Stand away, boys," called the engineer. "She's liable to throw a little of this light snow."

The crowd obediently fell back, and the engineer reached for the throttle. The spaced exhausts of steam quickened. With a jerk the front roller began to revolve, and the snow arose in clouds. Louder and faster grew the engine's snorts until they rose and merged in a roar. Higher and further flew the side-flung snow, driving back the crowd until the engine was hidden from view, but the box car was still visible—and unmoving. Flying clods of frozen earth now appeared with the snow and the engine's roaring rose almost to a scream.

"Sounds like she's developin' twenty mile a hour, all right," yelled Packsaddle to the others as they dodged the hail of dirt.

"Perhaps twenty-five," Kansas shouted back.

Suddenly the steam was shut off, the roar subsided to stillness and the engine slowly reappeared from its cloud. It was tilted at a dangerous angle on the edge of the hole which the toothed front wheel had been digging. The horsewranglers surveyed it solemnly.

"She ain't much good as an engine," remarked Kansas, "but she sure would be a hell of a gravedigger!"

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"Well," said Andy Bell with a sigh, "I always did like horses."

This performance should have been celebration enough but the four also took in the patent medicine show before they left the town, sitting in the dimly lighted tent on a plank that sagged ominously beneath their weight, giving careful attention to a large man in a shabby frock coat and a tall silk hat in desperate need of brushing, who dwelt at length upon the virtues of the sovereign Indian remedy he was introducing to their community. They were asked to look at the Kickapoo chief who had punctuated the speech with rich reverberations of the tom-tom, and who now stood forth magnificent in blanket and feathers and scornful mien. This chief had inherited the secret formula from his ancestors which he was now sharing with his white brothers.

"Them Kickapoo squaws must be a lazy lot," muttered Slim audibly to the others.

"How so?" asked Andy Bell.

"He's had to get some Blackfoot woman to make his moccasins," declared Slim, and the "Kickapoo's" eyes flickered in their direction and away again.

The harangue ended, curtains were drawn back to exhibit a stretched sheet. The sputter and stench at the rear of the tent announced the magic lantern and upon the sheet, after a period of blurring and sharpening to obtain the focus, appeared a sign announcing "Views from Near and Far." The lantern slides succeeded one another. Occasionally one appeared upside down and had to be hurriedly withdrawn and changed. The Klondikers from the East cheered Niagara Falls. The horsewranglers and the others from the West greeted Old Faithful with whistles and cowpuncher yells. The evening was obviously a success, but the climax was reached when the frock-coated announcer declared the last number on the program to be the Zoetrope, the wonder of the age that shows drawings in motion as if they were alive.

There was a commotion around the magic lantern as some apparatus was set up and then, before the amazed eyes of the audience, appeared a drawing of a skeleton upon the screen. As they watched the skeleton began a jerky, flickering, but quite recognizable dance.

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It lifted its arms, it kicked, it turned its head; in the end it flew in pieces, scattered over the screen, and then flew together again and came to rest. The effect was stupendous. Men whooped and yelled in their applause, and the horsewranglers pushed forward to buy a bottle of the Sagwar from the Kickapoo chief with the Blackfoot feet.

"It wouldn't be right," declared Kansas, "not to do somethin' for the boys that could put up so good a show."

They carried their prize outside, and Packsaddle removed the cork. He sniffed the contents.

"I've breathed in liquor that had a worse smell than that," he declared.

They all sniffed and agreed with him.

"With a smell like that it might have a kick," said Andy Bell.

"Try it," urged Kansas, and Andy tipped up the bottle.

He took one gulp, then coughed and spat copiously.

"God!" he exclaimed, his eyes full of tears. "I'd sure have to be thirsty before I took to that. Wow!" and he spat again.

Reluctantly they gave up the thought of Sagwar as a beverage.

"But anyway," they all agreed, "the show was all right."

After the episode of the snow engine, the doings of their fellow Klondikers were subjects of great interest to the horsewranglers. They lost no opportunity to watch them as they came and went to town. Hundreds of men were now in Edmonton outfitting for the trail to the Yukon and over three-fourths of the number were Americans. Practically none was a miner by profession, and very few seemed even to be men of the out-of-doors. They thronged along the sidewalks and in the shops buying lavishly and often preposterously. They struggled in the streets with draft animals, dogs or horses, to which it was apparent they were utterly unused. Flapjack came back one night full of indignation over a sight he had seen.

"Two fellows had a good horse," he told them. "Any one with half an eye could see it was a fine horse, but they had him so bewildered he was plumb spoilt. Hitched up single he was to a sled,

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and these two fellows was hangin' back on the reins to hold him in, and hollerin' at him and whippin' him to make him go ahead, and the horse had just balked on 'em. Made up his mind he couldn't work for such folks, I guess. Well, them two galoots has heard that the right way to start a balky horse is with fire, so they sets up a little pile of hay right under him and touches it off. Then they climbs back onto their sled. Sufferin' coyotes! When that horse feels that fire he doesn't do nothin' but just naturally make kindlin'-wood of that sled! Left it strewed along the road. And the men—they say one has a broken leg and the ribs is all stove in on the other. Men like that oughtn't to be let loose with horses, leave alone allowed to try to drive 'em to Dawson."

But if the majority of the parties were astonishing because of the lacks in preparation and equipment, Lord Avonmore was equally amazing because of the profusion of his furnishings. He had arrived in Edmonton early with a carload of horses he had brought from eastern Canada, some said from England, yet he had been known to buy sixty-five head more. His partners were young aristocrats like himself. Gossip had it that there were sixteen English lords in the party and one Irish one. They took plenty of time in gathering their personnel of workers, human and animal, and trained them carefully. Avonmore had been across the Sahara, so rumor said, and he was taking no chances. He had bought, in addition to the horses, two magnificent dog-teams for which he paid a fabulous sum. He had hired sixteen men to help the servants and grooms he had brought with him. Packsaddle went over to see them start when at last they took the trail and he reported unbelievable wonders.

"They had a ten-gallon keg of whiskey on almost every toboggan," he declared. "And you never see so much provender for the humans, and hay and oats that they brought clear from East Canada for them horses of theirs. Three horses was loaded down with nothin' but—what do you think?"

"What?" they asked him.

"Toilet paper!" he snorted. "And two more had packs of these." He exhibited a gunny-sack half full of something.

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The horsewranglers crowded near.

"What are they?" asked Slim. "Pills?"

"No, they ain't pills. They're sugar."

"Sugar!" exclaimed Kansas, and he took a white pellet and tasted it. "You've shuffled the cards somewhere, Packsaddle. These ain't sweet. They're bitter as hell."

"It's sugar all the same, boss," asserted the freighter. "Their cook told me about 'em. Flapjack, give us some of that stuff you got in your pot."

The coffee was produced, Packsaddle dropped one of the white pills into it and stirred vigorously.

"Now then, Kansas," he said, "taste that."

"Well, I'll be damned," ejaculated Kansas, "if it ain't sweet." He passed it around that the others might sip. "Did they give you that half sackful, Packsaddle? It will sure come in handy."

"Not knowingly they didn't," admitted Packsaddle. "But I'll say this for 'em. They won't miss it from all they got left."

On the fourteenth of February the horsewranglers made their "Hudson's Bay start" to St. Albert. They had been delayed a day looking for a mare that had gotten away when the herd was being watered. After a day of searching Kansas picked up her trail twelve miles south of town. She was hours ahead of him, traveling fast, headed for the Big Horn Mountains and home. He sat on his horse in the road and in his heart he followed her and wished her well.

He never heard that she made it, though.

So it was with fifty-nine head that they set out from Edmonton on what they felt was really the first march of the long journey. At St. Albert they camped on the place of Mr. Maloney, the government official from whom they had bought the six tons of barley. The barley was in bulk and for the rest of the week they worked getting it into bags that it might be packed. The Klondikers were on the move now, an endless procession trudging afoot or driving their sleds past the horsewranglers' camp on Sturgeon River. Now and again they were called to help some unfortunate through a drift. Once Kansas and Slim spent an entire day hunting for a party of men who were reported to be caught in the snow seven

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miles up the trail, only to find when they reached the place that the travelers had been rescued by others.

The "Hudson's Bay start" had revealed no weakness of harness or sleds. Their transportation had worked perfectly; but it was cold, forty-five below according to Mr. Maloney's thermometer, and Flapjack Charlie had decided he also needed a mackinaw after all, and when he made the trip back to town Kansas sent his elk-skin mittens to be lined.

On Sunday they went into St. Albert, the village on the shore of Big Lake, and strolled through its snowy streets, listening to the ringing of bells on the convent and the church. It was a homesick, lonesome sort of sound, they thought, as they watched the band of children being shepherded from the orphanage to the church by the black-robed Sisters of Charity. The place was much more strange and foreign than Edmonton.

On Monday the barley was all in bags, and Packsaddle and Andy Bell went ahead to learn the condition of the road through the wooded defile of the Sturgeon River where so many had been stopped a few days previously. By evening they returned to report that the road was now very good, and on Tuesday the horse-wranglers branded the horses with their mark, a dot within a diamond on the hip, to be ready to take the trail. Joe LaRose came out from Edmonton that night with three others of their friends, bringing a bottle of whiskey as a good-by gift, and when the others went back to town that night Mr. LaRose stayed behind to see the start in the morning.

When the tents were struck and packed and the line of march formed, the good man stood by the gate, holding it open and waving to each one. They could see that his eyes were moist. Slim had driven the herd of loose horses at the rear of the procession through the gate and reined up beside Kansas who was lingering with LaRose.

"You brought us a bottle of whiskey, Mr. LaRose," he said, "do you suppose you could say, 'Mush along, horsewranglers?'"

"My friend," cried LaRose, aghast, "'mush along' is what one says to dogs! One would never say it to a man."

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"Well, maybe not," admitted Slim, "but you see at home they didn't know that. So they brought us some whiskey and told us to 'mush along.' Sort of wishin' us luck, you see."

"Ah," said their friend quickly. "It is for a souvenir. Then, indeed, since I, too, wish you luck, I will say it. Mush along, my horsewranglers, mush along!"



Chapter V

THEY ENTER THE WILDERNESS

THE red lights and long shadows of the early winter evening slanted across Lake Berlin, touched the Indian cabin among the pines and threw its long silhouette over the Hudson's Bay Company's road. The man in the wide-brimmed hat sitting astride the load on the first sled pulled his team to a standstill. He examined the surroundings carefully and quickly, the tall slough-grass on the marshy edge of the lake, the trees to break the bitterness of the night's wind, and being satisfied with what he saw turned his team off the road.

"Campin' here, Kansas?" called the driver of the second sled.

"I guess that's about it," assented the leader, who was already loosening the tugs on his team. "The Indians have a waterhole on the ice, and there's a spring behind the cabin there, Flapjack, where you can get all the water you need."

"Bunkin' in the cabin?" asked Dad, as he turned in between the trees.

"No," declared Kansas. "Family's away all right, but I can't be certain they ain't due back to-night. We'll make camp over here to the side."

Gradually the company gathered together, winding into the grove from the road, all but Andrew Bell.

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"He'll be along soon," said Packsaddle in response to queries. "His team got lively a while back. Ran away on him, dumped the sled and him, and scattered the load over about a square mile of assorted timber land. A party on the trail caught the horses. I helped him rig up some sort of a harness and when I last seen him he was combin' the timber for the load. Them tenderfeet along the trail was sure learnin' a lot from his language, too."

They scattered to the work of making camp. Some drove the horses to water and turned them out on the edge of the slough where they could crop the marsh grass or paw down through the powdery dry snow to the short feed underneath. Others shoveled snow from their camping site, drove in the iron stakes and set up the tent, while Flapjack in a few minutes' brisk work with his ax collected and split his firewood, saving the lopped evergreen tops at one side. From this pile each man selected bedding and spread it out on the tent floor under his bedroll to keep the frost from striking through. Even if the wind brought up a storm they would sleep snug.

Occasional belated parties of Klondikers passed along the road, one, two, four of them before the laggard Andy Bell appeared with his chastened team. Sitting on the cook-tent, spread out upon the snow, they ate their supper and then smoked luxuriously, their talk of the things of the trail. The road was not bad so far, they agreed, but another day or two would see them beyond the settlements. Then they could expect trouble. And no more easy feed for the horses like the big straw stack they struck the first day, where the stock could fill themselves at five cents a head, or the hay they bought from the half-breeds on the Indian Reserve, as much as a horse could hold for two bits.

"Them horses and mules will have to work now for their grub," said Packsaddle, "same as us men."

Darkness had come and with it a deeper cold. Talk grew desultory. The two whose turn it was to guard the horses flipped a coin for the first watch and the winner moved out of the fire-light. Even Flapjack had finished his nightly chores. One by one

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they rolled into their waiting beds, and silence and the winter wind filled all the space beneath the pines.

They had climbed up through the Horse Hills from the wooded valley of the Sturgeon River to a rolling country of little lakes and streams where cabins grew few and far between, and where the smooth white of the open spaces alternated with the feathery lacing of bare poplar boughs and the dark stain of spruce and pine. On the fifth day from St. Albert they reached the crest of Lake La Nonne hill, and the valley of the Saskatchewan dropped away behind them. Below lay the irregular snowy shield of the lake with its many points and bays, and far to north and west extended, fold on forested fold, the great white wilderness. The woods were mostly a second growth of aspen, birch and cottonwoods with scattering evergreens covering the scar of some forgotten forest fire, but traces of the virgin growth, great black spruces and giant cottonwoods, survived along the river courses, and dense stands of larches marked the swamps. Winding down to the Pembina River the Hudson's Bay Company's road, dwindled now to little more than a trail, was penciled in black by the moving parties of the Klondikers treading on each other's hurrying heels. The horse-wranglers' caravan in time with the rest crossed the summit, and started the descent.

The road zigzagged down the hill, and at every turn were the evidences of spills, goods scattered down the slope, knots of men engaged in reassembling their loads. The horsewranglers came down cautiously, the tongues of their sleds dragging, the horses holding back strongly. There was only one mishap, when Packsaddle's mules made too sharp a turn, and his coasting sled rode up over the pole with one runner, pitching the unbalanced load over the edge. What the old freighter said to those mules should have scorched their furry ears.

Seven miles from the summit, at the bank of the Pembina River they came to a halt. The river ran in a deep channel and the high abrupt banks extended in either direction as far as eye could see. Some parties had camped on the south side and were packing their goods across on their own backs, or on the backs of their horses.

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Some had evidently coasted down somehow with loaded sleds, and had pitched tents on the river which here was about five hundred feet wide, intending to unload and to pack up the north bank. While the horsewranglers watched, a sled with a single horse started over the edge, the horse almost sitting on his haunches, and stepping down a foot or so at a time. The pace increased as the full weight of the load came on the hill and as the horse's feet began to slide. They arrived at the bottom in a whirl of snow but apparently upright and intact. The waiting drivers above and below cheered.

"Don't you think we could make that all right?" asked Kansas of Packsaddle and Slim who had joined him on the brink.

"We sure ought to try before we unpack," declared Slim.

"You bet!" said Packsaddle. "But you lead off, Kansas. I ain't got no confidence just now in them long-eared fools of mine."

Kansas accordingly went for his team and the others watched them as they negotiated the hill, weaving expertly from side to side to ease the slope. Then one by one they followed.

At the top of the north bank a block and tackle had been set up, some said by the Hudson's Bay Company for the use of their freighters, and others maintained by an enterprising citizen who saw the need of the Klondikers. In any case the man in charge was doing a rushing business. The horsewranglers made use of this assistance for their first four teams, but discovering that the man's price was three dollars for their bobsled and one dollar for single sleds, they paid the six dollars already due and doubled their teams to get the rest of their loads up from the river. Two miles down the river from the crossing they found a great lot of hay left behind by some previous party, and went into camp for the night.

Their course led northwest from the Pembina over to the Athabaska, across a rolling plain covered with forest that was broken here and there by open spaces where the winter-cured hay stood as in the parks of the mountain valleys at home. There were ponds innumerable and lakes in the shallow depressions. As they neared the river they crossed great areas that had been burnt, black skeletons of trees showing above a low second growth, and crossed

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a network of fallen giants lying treacherous beneath the snow wherever the men left the trail.

The snow was deep but still so light that the mules and horses could paw down to feed although they sometimes sank to their shoulders in so doing. There were days when it was almost hot at noon with the sun above and the reflection from the snow below, and then again it would snow until it seemed as if the very air had turned to the falling, smothering flakes. Six inches fell in a single night.

They had passed far beyond the settlements, and there were no regular travelers on the road save the pressing parties of the Klondikers before and behind them with whom they camped at night. These were stringing out now in a process of classification due to the speed of their travel. The horsewranglers grew familiar and friendly with those who kept pace with them, particularly with a party of young Easterners who won the admiration of the cowpunchers by the persistent humor with which they regarded all the mishaps of the trail. A broken sled, a scattered load, even that crowning tragedy, a missing horse, became to these youngsters a subject for laughter, and the men from the range recognized a spirit akin to their own. They welcomed these strangers to their campfire and after young Putnam had ridden the Buckskin Devil, he at least became one of them. The solemn-faced Slim had bet the New Yorker he could not ride the range horse around the camp, and Putnam had mounted the yellow whirlwind. He was promptly bucked off, not once but three separate times. In the end, however, the buckskin carried him around the circuit, more often on two legs than on four. The cowpunchers greeted him with tumultuous yips and yells, and dubbed him Bronco then and there.

Occasionally a wave of excitement passed along the trail, as on the day when they heard the Company's teams were coming through on the way to Fort Nelson. They watched with envious eyes the light dog-teams whirling past, three of them, one behind the other, the dogs with shaggy coats and curling tails scampering at top speed, the drivers sitting on the sledges or running alongside. On another day when Kansas and his friends were at dinner

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they heard a sound that was strange indeed, the monotonous complaint of ungreased axles slowly turning, and the scream of iron tires on snow. They hurried to the side of the Company's road in time to see four carts approaching around a bend. Each cart was mounted on two great wheels and drawn by a single slow-moving ox. The drivers, goad in hand, trudged beside the beasts. They looked tired, these plodding men, and the horsewranglers hailed them, offering a share in their noon meal in return for news of the trail. Between mouthfuls the drivers explained they were hay-haulers engaged in carrying fodder from the pastures of the settlements to the Hudson's Bay Company's winter ranch beyond Lesser Slave Lake. They had delivered a load at the post and were returning for another. The road would be found to be fair, they said, as far as the Landing on Peace River where the Company was accustomed to transfer their freight to boats. The oldest of the drivers when the meal was over took out a stubby pipe and packed it with villainous black tobacco.

"Last fall," he said, "Mounted Police make new trail for carts. Short way from beyond Athabaska to Fort St. John."

"That's good news for us," said Kansas.

"Maybe so, maybe no," returned the driver as they rose to their feet. "Road short all right, but must be ver' rough, and plenty place wit' no feed. You keep on old trail. Dat's plenty bad, but you always can get feed."

Then he set his great beast in motion and with his three companions creaked slowly out of sight and hearing.

The Athabaska gave the range riders their first idea of the great rivers of the North. Its bordering timber had escaped the prehistoric conflagration, and the men saw with wonder the hoary giant pines, bearded with moss from the top to the ground, towering above poplar and birch that were themselves ancient trees. The dark branches of the evergreens kept up a continuous low murmur like a never-ending sigh, even when the air at their feet was apparently still. They watched like sentinels above the forest, marking the line of the immense stream that even under its suave covering of snowy ice seemed to sweep, resistless, round its measureless bends.

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"It's sure big, ain't it?" said Flapjack in an awed voice, and they all agreed with him.

Beyond the river they had occasion to remember the description of the trail given by the hay-hauler, for they found that it was indeed "plenty bad." It led north through heavily timbered country uphill and down, winding to avoid down trees around curves where the trailing sled inevitably upset. The snow through this forest was soft and made hard pulling for the laboring teams even on the few level stretches.

Kansas riding ahead, now on Roman Nose, now on a riding-mule he had traded for at Edmonton, kept a keen eye for the tall slough-grass in the old beaver dams that marked good feed. The wisdom of breaking the horses to be interchangeable at their work was now apparent, for they could be used in shifts and have a day in harness and a day running loose. As a result the party began to pass those others on the trail who were less well equipped than themselves, and this with shorter drives than many of the Klondikers would permit.

The road crossed a succession of small streams with abrupt banks that made back-breaking work for animals and men. Sleds became unmanageable, and crashed into obstacles to break runners or flooring. In their insane hurry some tenderfeet abandoned these broken wrecks and heaped the load on already overtaxed beasts. Horses staggered on without proper rest or time enough to feed, staggered until they fell. And when the last horse was down, their masters, aghast, selected what food they needed or thought they could carry and turned back to Edmonton. The horse-wranglers began to meet these disheartened adventurers, some dazed and silent, some crazed with fear, shouting warning of danger and death ahead.

"Queer! These fellows giving out so soon," said Putnam soberly. He was riding with Slim for a day, herding loose stock. "Your horses and mules are as fat as butter, even those you're not working and don't feed."

"They're range horses," said Slim. "Used to winterin' out and used to rustlin' their own grub. Then, too, them fellows don't

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know no more about trailin' than their horses did. They've killed off their horses, and they'll kill off themselves as like as not. It's a pizen shame any of 'em was let to go on this trip—men or horses," he added.

On the ninth of March they came to the forks of the road. Remembering the advice of the hay-haulers the Wyoming men and their party chose the old dog-trail, but the Easterners having fewer stock to consider and being impatient already over the length of the way, took the shorter and newer road. Silently the range men watched them go.

The old dog-trail was a frightful road for horses. The hard-packed center was too narrow for the horsewranglers' double teams, sleds overturned continually and must as continually be repacked. Horses floundered. Often the very space between the trees would not admit of two animals passing through abreast and chopping was added to the other labors of a rough trail. Much time was given to repairing broken sleds. The pace slowed down from fifteen miles a day to five or even three. To add to the misery it began to snow, heavily and with a relentless determination. They could not always reach feed and for the first time must tie their horses up at night. The barley was too scarce to be spared for any but the working teams, and the range horses, hungry and disgusted, snuffled ineffectively at the snow, gnawed and crunched loudly at their improvised tie-rail, bit and kicked each other viciously in their unwonted proximity, and squealed and grunted all night; while their wranglers, torn between rage at the disturbance and pity for its cause, found it hard to sleep.

And the snow fell steadily.

The second day out they came up with the party ahead of them and the road being too narrow to pass they were obliged to stop. Kansas and Slim plunged through the snow to the head of the trail where they could see a tangled mass of sleds and horses, and hear the play of a fountain of profanity. A tree had been uprooted by the side of the road, but in the dense stand of timber had not been able to fall. Sustained by its neighbors it leaned across the trail, narrowing still further the narrow way. A Klondiker in try-

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ing to pass had jammed his sled so tightly between the leaning tree and its opposite that he could move neither forward nor back, and all the traffic behind him was brought to a standstill. The driver, because of inexperience or fright, had attempted to lash the horse through, thus thoroughly wedging himself into position. His partner in an effort to put the sled backward had merely succeeded in breaking the supporting struts of the runners. And still it snowed, blocking what trail there was.

The heads of the stalled parties held a conclave, and as a result they all camped where they were by the side of the road, the range horses being once more tied. By the combined labor of all the men the leaning tree was roped back until the sled could be extricated, and for several miles the trail was widened by chopping. The parties plunged forward, often missing the hard center of the trail under the deep new fall of snow, overturning, getting stuck, doubling teams and stumbling on. The summit of the divide between the Athabaska valley and Lesser Slave Lake was reached and a gorgeous sweep of country lay before them, but the tired horsewranglers could only see that the way ahead looked rough and heavily timbered.

The descent of the north side of the ridge proved disastrous and Kansas was forced to camp, again without feed, about halfway down the long hill because all the sleds were broken. This night they gave the tethered range horses some barley but water was out of the question. They were mending their sleds the following day when a dog-team bound for Slave Lake came up with their camp. The driver hailed them.

"Want to sell any of your horses?" he asked.

"Not here," said Kansas. "Why?"

"The Willis Party over on the New Trail have sent word back to Edmonton their horses are starving. They offer sixty dollars a head for horses to get them out."

The cowpunchers considered the matter.

"Ain't no use in goin' in after them without feed," said Pack-saddle.

"No use at all," agreed the driver.

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"And we're short of feed for our own herd," asserted Kansas, reluctantly, "if we have to do much more of this tyin' up at night."

"It ain't the men that's starvin'?" queried Flapjack anxiously.

"No, it's the horses. The men have grub. They can leave their other stuff and walk back. Anyway if you're short of feed you're not in any shape to help them."

"It's a damn shame," declared the horsewranglers, and the dog-team passed on its way.

Evidently the advice of the hay-hauler had been good; the old trail, bad as it might be, was preferable to the new, but it was hard to imagine anything worse than what they encountered before they reached Swan River. There were ridges to climb and descend again. Parties ahead of them having trouble occupied the trail in places where they had to chop a way around, and drag the reluctant horses through snow that was nearly waist deep. And at night when tired muscles ached unbearably and nerves screamed for rest they must mend the sleds and harness to be ready for the next day's going. They were caught once on an open hillside by a howling storm that lashed and blinded them. Flapjack as usual was at the front of the line of sleds, driving the bobs, and leading a team that dragged a load of barley. He kept his eyes fixed on the gray form of Kansas on Roman Nose who was picking the trail, and even as he watched the blizzard blotted out the figure as if it had not been. Flapjack leaped from the bobs and running to the horses' heads he yelled with all his might. The boss would be in danger if he should be caught in the storm alone, so the boy put all the strength of his young lungs into his shouting. But the wind tore the feeble sound from his throat and drowned it in a bellow of derision.

Then suddenly a warm, furry body collided with him. He reached up and seized the horse, feeling for bridle and saddle. It was Roman Nose, but the saddle was empty. Again he yelled, his voice hoarse with terror, and Kansas answered in as hoarse a shout from the other side of the team.

"I heard you the first time, kid, and thank you for hollerin'. Mind Roman Nose while I see if I can find any one behind us."

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He felt his way along to the end of the second sled, and the tearing wind brought his shouting back to Flapjack, but no answering yells. Presently he returned.

"They're out of reach," he said. "We're off the trail, so we might as well drift with this till we find somethin' to get behind."

Leading the horses they stumbled through the snow until they ran against a clump of evergreens, on the lee side of which they made what shelter they could out of the two sleds with their loads, and crawled into it together to shiver the night away. When the storm lifted the next morning and they could hunt for their companions, they found that Dad Wilkinson had smashed one of his sleds to bits, but Billy had happened to find him and they had spent the night together. Slim, Packsaddle and Andrew Bell had drifted with the horses into a fairly sheltered hollow and not one head of stock was missing.

Once more they made emergency repairs of the sleds, and strung out along the trail. Plunging, sliding, tipping and repacking, each day like the next, they came at length to the last steep descent to the Swan River valley. The pitch was so abrupt here that they did not dare to trust to their weakened harness, but unhitched the teams, letting the sleds down with a rope and leading the horses. On Wild Moose Creek, a mile from Swan River, where they found the first good grass, they camped that the range horses might eat their fill. And as they refitted harness and sleds, the rush of the Klondikers passed them by, haggard men and failing horses, staggering on and on.

Swan River with its fine rock bottom made them think of the streams in Wyoming, and they loitered down it on the ice taking time that the horses might make the most of the good feed on its banks. The ice was treacherously thin, even open in places where the swift current had already broken through, and frequent overflows from these holes made the going wet and dangerous, but the horsewranglers looked at the rough country on either hand through which the river ran, and preferred their level if slippery road. On windy nights they climbed the bank to the shelter of the pines, but usually they camped on the ice or on the gravel of the shore.

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Late one blustery afternoon Flapjack Charlie passed too close to a hole in the ice. The rear bob crashed through and the cook's bed was thrown from the toppling load into the water. Flapjack maneuvered his teams in safety to a rocky point at the bend of the river, and Billy Wilkinson who was following fished the bedroll from the hole but it was obviously soaked through.

"Right here is where we camp," declared Kansas, eyeing the dripping object. "Likewise you boys got to try a new kind of poison, for here's where I put my hand to the grub. Since Flapjack has washed his bed, I expect he aims now to dry it."

"Another cowpuncher gone all wrong!" mourned Slim. "Washin' his bed!"

They pitched their tents under the shelter of the trees, built a roaring fire among the rocks, and Flapjack set about the long task of drying blankets and quilts. From their outlook on the point they could see some distance up and down the river. Here and there the carcass of a horse marked the trail, and the parties of Klondikers showed dark against the whiteness of the ice.

"Here they come again," observed Flapjack to Kansas who was setting out his cooking things around the fire.

"Who?"

"That preacher with his wife and boy we passed this afternoon. And the poor old horse is still actin' ornery."

They watched the sorry little group coming down the river, a stoop-shouldered man leading a scarecrow of a horse, a woman drooping with fatigue sitting on a heavily loaded sled, and a slight boyish figure in dark mackinaw, red mittens and a red cap pushing valiantly from behind. The horse moved slowly, its feet sliding unsteadily. Suddenly it sat down in the shafts. As at a signal long understood, the boy came forward, the woman rose from her seat, and when the man had loosened the harness, the three shoved the sled clear. The man and boy dragged the horse to its feet and laboriously reharnessed.

"How do you know he's a preacher?" asked Kansas.

"Nobody but a preacher would wrangle that horse without

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swearin’,” asserted Flapjack confidently. “That’s the fourth time I’ve seen ’em reharnessin’ this afternoon.”

The three on the ice proceeded on their way. They skirted the hole that Flapjack’s accident had enlarged, and rounded the bend. A few hundred feet downstream a recently frozen overflow spread like a sheet of glass and here the horse again lost his footing. They saw the man drop the reins and seize the horse by the cheek-straps. He shook the beast’s head and then stared in its face. The wind brought his voice to them, high and vibrating with passion.

“I’ve tried to live a Christian on this trail,” he was saying, “but DAMN YOU, you won’t let me.”

There was a moment of silence and then the woman and the boy burst into shouts of laughter, in which presently the man himself ruefully joined. They laughed and laughed while the old horse lay on his side and looked down the river. Even after they had him up and were harnessing again, a burst of mirth from one or another would start them all off in another gale. The merry sound was borne back to the two men on the point even when the party had passed out of sight around another curve in the stream.

“Anyways they ain’t downhearted,” said Flapjack.

The process of drying the bed even with the help of a warm noon sun was not completed the next day, yet for the sake of the herd the horsewranglers had to move from their rocky camp in the late afternoon. Five miles downstream a wide hay meadow by the side of the river offered good pasture. There were several parties already camped here, but there seemed to be ample room. Kansas and Flapjack built the fire together, and then before settling down again to the monotonous spreading and turning of his blankets, the boy took the bucket and set out to find the spring and get water for the cooking. The temporary campers had beaten a path between the pines to the waterhole, and Flapjack swung along in the dusk, eyes alert for signs of moose. He had seen tracks that morning and could think of little else. If only he could get away from this crowd once, he would—

The path dipped sharply down to the pool, and Flapjack saw some one was ahead of him. He caught a gleam of a scarlet cap and

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red mittens as he rattled down to the spring. The wearer of the cap straightened with filled pail, turned and faced him.

"My God!" cried Flapjack. "It's a girl!"

She flushed angrily and her dark eyes blazed.

"I wish I could declare with equal fervor that you were a gentleman. Please let me pass."

Flapjack was overwhelmed.

"No offense intended, miss, please. It's just that I saw you yesterday on the river, shovin' that sled along, and—I didn't think—I didn't know—"

He made a pleading gesture with his hands, quite unconscious that he still held his empty bucket. The girl looked from the dangling bucket to the troubled, honest blue eyes above her and her face softened a bit. Flapjack saw the relenting and pursued what he hoped was an advantage.

"Me and my pardners seen the trouble you been havin' with that ornery horse of yours."

"Oh, Pegasus," she said and smiled.

"What?" queried Flapjack.

"Pegasus," she repeated. "We call him that, Mother and I. It's the name of a Greek horse with wings, you know, who just flew along." With one hand she indicated airy indirections of flight. Flapjack grinned.

"It's sure appropriate," he acknowledged. "Wait till I fill this pail and I'll help you up with yours." He hurriedly slopped up a bucketful of water and then took her pail. "If you've been drivin' Pegasus all day and ain't got no farther than this he must have been sittin' more than he walked."

The girl laughed delightedly.

"Oh, we got here last night," she vouchsafed. "But we saw what good feed there was and we stayed over a day. You see, part of the trouble is that Pegasus is old. It's a hard road for an old horse, and we thought the rest would do him good, too."

"And I'll bet your father wasn't sorry for a chance to sit around."

The girl's eyes darkened.

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"Poor Father!" she said. "He hasn't had much of a rest, for he has to keep track of Pegasus."

"The hell, you say!" ejaculated Flapjack.

The girl laughed again.

"No, I didn't, but there are times when I'd like to. If Father so much as drops that horse's lead-rope he starts for home. And maybe you think he can't hurry. He doesn't think much of this trip, Pegasus doesn't."

They had reached the door of a tent, and the girl held out her hand for her water pail.

"Thank you for carrying it," she said.

"Look here, miss," said Flapjack eagerly, "I'm goin' to bring some of my pardners over to see you folks. We're herdin' horses, you know. You wait, I'll fetch 'em."

Flapjack hurried back to camp and to Kansas, Packsaddle and Slim he told of his encounter and what he had learned.

"The poor old geezer is leadin' that horse around with a rope all day so he can feed," he concluded, "and God knows what they do at night."

Kansas nodded at the others.

"Go over and fix it up. I got to tend this grub."

The three returned to the girl's tent. Her father had come in from the meadow and was tying the dejected Pegasus to a tree. The girl was nowhere to be seen. The preacher secured his knot and turned to scan the tall Westerners.

"Good evening," he said. He was obviously at a loss to account for their presence.

The three returned his greeting and then stood awkwardly. The others looked at Flapjack, and Flapjack looked wildly around for the girl.

"Beg pardon, stranger," he said, "but your daughter—"

"Yes?" The monosyllable was polite but very distant.

"Is she—is she here?" The boy was in an agony of embarrassment.

"I don't know. I have just returned myself. Mother!" he called to some one in the tent: "Is Anne there?"

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"Yes, she's here. Why?" The mother's head appeared a moment at the tent door. She, too, scanned the three. "Oh," said she, and disappeared.

"I guess he's come back, Anne," they heard her say.

And the two emerged. Anne laid her hand on her father's arm.

"One of these gentlemen brought some water from the spring for us just now, and we were talking about Pegasus. I'd like to introduce you," she said to Flapjack, "but I don't know your name. Mine's Anne Shirley."

"I'm Flapjack," returned the boy, "and these are two of my pardners, Slim and Packsaddle."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Shirley with a smile. "Does anybody really call you that?"

Slim intervened easily.

"They don't call us anythin' else where we come from, ma'am, but we've got other names all right. Flapjack's upset at meetin' two ladies at once, I expect. His name's Peterson, mine's Jackson, and this is George Raymond."

Mr. Shirley shook hands cordially.

"Won't you come in?" he urged. "There isn't much space but I guess we can manage."

"Thank you, no," said Flapjack who had recovered his tongue. "Grub's most ready over at our camp and Kansas is liable to call us any minute to come and get it. You see we just stepped over to borrow Pegasus for the night."

"Pegasus?" said the preacher. "For the night?"

Even Anne looked amazed.

"We're horsewranglers, you see, sir," explained Packsaddle.

"And we have a herd over here," further elucidated Slim, "that we're night-herdin' anyway."

"So if you'll let me throw Pegasus in with our bunch, he can run free and eat all night, and no danger of his back-trackin' on you," concluded Flapjack.

"Oh, Father!" cried Anne, relief and laughter in her voice.

"I don't believe I understand," said Mr. Shirley. "Are you offer-

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ing to care for my horse? Indeed I couldn't think of imposing on you. He is a great trial to manage."

"He wouldn't be no trouble at all," declared Flapjack vehemently.

"We're ridin' guard on our own bunch anyhow," persisted Slim.

"We wouldn't do nothin' different for him."

"He probably wouldn't want to light out," added Packsaddle, "if he was with a bunch of other horses."

"You'll leave us have him, won't you, sir?" pleaded Flapjack.

"Oh, Father!" cried Mrs. Shirley with tears in her eyes. "Aren't they kind!"

"Pshaw! ma'am," expostulated Slim. "It ain't nothin'. Nothin' a-tall. Your horse will be better able to trail to-morrow, sir, if you let him run free to-night, so if you're not goin' to say no we'll take him. Got him, Flapjack? That's right. So long, sir, see you in the mornin'. Good night, ma'am, good night, miss."

And the three horsewranglers with Pegasus clumping behind them vanished into the darkness.



Chapter VI

THEY ADOPT A FAMILY

THE ice on Swan River was certainly bad. The horsewranglers had been struggling with it all day, wavering back and forth from one side of the stream-bed to the other in the effort to find the thickest places. Even in the early morning when the going was usually at its best they had been hard put to it to pick a safe way. Once the loose horses that Kansas was herding crashed through a bit of frozen overflow. Luckily the old heavy ice beneath held, but the men had received a scare, and the horses had been made almost unmanageable by their fright. This nervousness did not make the afternoon driving easier, when the comparative heat of the day had made the frozen river more treacherous. Kansas was obliged to keep all his mind on his unruly string, only occasionally could he watch the crooked line of sleds ahead of him. Yet he was uneasy about the rest. Slim was driving the bobs for Flapjack Charlie, and Slim did not drive as easily as he rode.

They skirted warily around dark stains on the snow that marked the thinly covered airholes, they edged over sidling places where the ice had crumpled in its formation and slid, one layer over another, at angles that made footing well-nigh impossible and an upset the likeliest outcome. The men walked by the side of the teams and with straining backs eased the sleds over the obstacles. They had covered nearly seventeen miles of this work since morn-

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ing and they were tired, but they had come upon no camping-place suitable for the horses. The wind was rising now and sweeping up the river valley from the still unseen lake. It was stinging cold.

Suddenly the men in front shouted. Beyond a high cut-bank was a low cove where the feathery tops of marsh grass waved above the snow. There should be good feed here. The weary animals saw it too and quickened their pace. Slim's horses were trotting. Then there came an ominous crackling, followed by a hollow reverberating crash as the ice gave way, first under the rear of the heavily laden bob, then, as the horses plunged to extricate themselves, under the hoofs of the team. Luckily the river was not more than four feet deep; the horses could get a foothold, but the icy black water that swirled about their bodies poured over the bobsled and almost covered the tents, the beds and the food that it carried.

Leaving the other sleds at a safe distance from the hole, Slim's partners swarmed to his assistance. Seeing that the team could not move the heavy sled over the stones of the river bottom, Kansas, Flapjack and Billy Wilkinson jumped into the water and hastily unloaded, tossing the packages by relay to Dad and Andy Bell on the edge of the sound ice. Packsaddle drove his sleds to the shore under the cut-bank, dumped his loads and returned for the rescued freight. By the time the frightened team had been unharnessed and brought singly ashore the men could drag the emptied sled out after them.

Under the cut-bank the biting wind was somewhat broken and the bedraggled company here took stock of their situation. All the men were more or less wet, for those who had not actually been in the water had been handling the contents of the bob that had oozed continuously and indiscriminately. By quick action three of the seven beds had been taken out before the tarpaulins wrapped about them had been soaked through, but the tents were so drenched that the space inside would be more cheerless than the open air, and the food was in such a condition that only a meager meal could be prepared. A roaring fire was built against the bank and the few dry blankets were divided among them all. Shivering and still

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hungry the men crouched about their fire, but the dampness of their clothing soon impregnated their scanty coverings and neither the warmth of the blaze they kept going all night, nor the lurid heat of the language they used to describe their woes, sufficed to comfort them. Too wretched for real sleep they cursed and dozed and woke to curse again.

A hot breakfast somewhat revived their spirits, but when they were at last under way again they found the river indescribably bad. The wind sweeping up its valley as through a funnel cut the men in their damp clothing to the bone, and the ice lay in heavy ridges and was honeycombed with holes. A second ducking a few miles from their night camp, this time of two sledloads of barley, convinced the horsewranglers that even the rough trail along the shore was preferable to such a road.

They double-teamed up the bank to the west side of the river but before they could bring all the teams to the higher level another disaster overtook them. Packsaddle announced it.

"You flop-eared, misbegotten son of a philanderin' jackass!" they heard him shout in a voice hoarse with rage, and they hastened to investigate.

One of the foremost of Packsaddle's mules had taken advantage of his master's absence to tear open his team-mate's canvas collar, and with well-directed jerks had pulled out and eaten all the hay with which it was stuffed. The canvas casing dangled flabby and useless. No mule could pull against such a harness. The culprit with soft lustrous eyes veiled by meek lashes was giving sorrowful attention to the freighter's catalogue of all his sins of omission and commission and the scandals of his ancestry, but his look of engaging innocence was belied by the wisp of straw that he was still trying to draw into his mouth with surreptitious movements of his lips.

"It ain't as if he hadn't had more to eat than we have lately," objected Kansas. "I'm surprised you'd bring up a mule to be that hoggish, Packsaddle."

The freighter snorted.

"How in hell are we goin' to stuff that collar?" he demanded.

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They looked about hopelessly. Then some one pointed out the moss on the evergreen trees and they scattered to gather what they could find, while Dad Wilkinson pulled his load apart to get out his harness needle and thread. The rent made by the mule had to be mended after the stuffing was done. Altogether it must have been at least an hour before they moved on through the trees, more chilled than ever by the inaction. When, therefore, a few miles along in the timber they came on an old cabin, evidently deserted and having a wide chimney at one end, they gave vent to yells of joy, and turning the horses into its clearing they tumbled inside the door. The roof was whole and there was a fine fireplace where they could toast their soaked provisions and dry their clothes and beds. For parts of two days they lingered, taking time to thaw the chill and the ache of fatigue out of lamed muscles, and they slept snug at night although the snow fell outside, heavy and wet.

Around the cabin they noticed the first of the balsam poplars. Balm of Gilead trees, Dad Wilkinson said the Canadians called them, but to these plainsmen they were magnified cottonwoods that linked them with home. They stared at the soaring trunks, as they moved about in the afternoon preparing to leave. They were three or four feet in diameter, rising a clear seventy feet or more to the first branching. It was good to be near such trees. After their rest they could actually realize that Swan River was beautiful, winding between its wooded banks, with the black etching of its evergreens and the silver stems of its birches; and if the way was rough they could tackle the creek crossings with a will, easing the bobsled down with a rope and whooping and cheering the horses up on the other side.

When, the next day, the trail turned away from the river and struck across toward Lesser Slave Lake, Slim even began to sing, for the first time in weeks.

“Good-by, Old Paint, I’m a-leavin’ Cheyenne,
Good-by, Old Paint, I’m a-leavin’ Cheyenne.
My foot’s in the stirrup, my pony won’t stand,
Good-by, Old Paint, I’m a-leavin’ Cheyenne.”

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The road was fairly level and the rhythmic beat of hoofs seemed to mark the tune. One by one the others took up the song:

"Old Paint's a good pony, he paces when he can," [sang Slim].

"Good-by, Little Annie, I'm off for Cheyenne."

"Oh, hitch up your horses and feed them some hay," [pleaded the others].

"My horses ain't hungry, they'll not eat your hay," [retorted Slim].

"My wagon is loaded and rollin' away.

My foot's in the stirrup, my rein's in my hand.

Good mornin', young lady, my horses won't stand."

"Good-by, Old Paint" [they chorused together], "I'm a-leavin' Cheyenne."

They camped where their trail came out on the shore in the light of a gorgeous sunset that hung the lowering clouds with fringes of fire, and veiled the plain in a copper haze. Far behind them the hills at the head of Swan River marked the distance they had come. Before them lay the lake, its length extending east and west for thirty miles in either direction, with point after point reaching out into the white ice from its irregular shore. Opposite, nearly fifteen miles from the bay where the horsewranglers were, the north shore stretched a flat, scantily timbered line with a low range behind it shouldering the threatening sky.

"There's wind in them clouds," observed Packsaddle uneasily.

And that night the wind came, howling across the ice from the barren wastes beyond the northern ridge, bringing bitter cold and a blizzard of snow. For four days in the lulls of that storm they struggled westward along the shore of the lake, following its general direction without regard to indentations, now exposed to the worst of the wind on the ice of the bays, now in the comparative shelter of the points they crossed. There was plenty of feed anywhere along the shore, but they had to get water from the lake. They put down holes through three feet of ice, chopping first

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with their axes, prying and breaking loose the deeper fragments with a crowbar, and finally shooting through the bottom with their rifles. When the water came it rushed up into the well as if pressure were behind it and ran over the ice like a stream.

Here and there they came on signs that they were nearing settlements again. On Swan River they had met Indian trappers. Now they occasionally passed canoes drawn up from the lake shore, lying in a row, turned upside down near high racks built for the drying of fish. Then one day when the cold was intense the trail brought them to a village of the Crees, where they lay by with other Klondikers. The same storm was keeping the hunters and trappers from their usual winter tasks, and the restlessness of forced inactivity drew the camp and the village together. The horse-wranglers were struck by the independence and self-possession of these forest Indians. They were well dressed and comfortably housed. By their skill in woodcraft they were self-sustaining and need ask favors of none. In their painstaking English learned at the Mission schools and at the Hudson's Bay Company's posts, they exchanged experiences of the winter trails with the travelers, explaining in answer to questions that they made their living from the forest in the winter and from the lake in the summer. Great catches of whitefish were taken in nets. Even now they had lines out through the ice. Flapjack Charlie and Billy tried their luck at one of these lines, but caught nothing. They could buy all the dried fish they might want, however, for very little. It was used for dog food and was cheap. The horsewranglers remembered having seen it stacked up like cordwood behind certain stores at Edmonton, and the Indians assured them that they sold quantities to the traders there, freighting it out on their dog-teams.

"They sure work more than any Injuns I ever seen," remarked Andy Bell, voicing the thoughts of all.

Among the parties camped at the village they found the Shirleys, and Pegasus was once more herded with the horses from Wyoming. The girl had greeted them all with pleased surprise.

"But we thought you were miles ahead of us," she had said.

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"Well, you see, miss," explained Kansas, "we took a coupla days off to dry out our flour."

"Dry out your flour?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Packsaddle, "and our beds, to say nothin' of blankets."

"And clothes," added Dad Wilkinson.

"But what under the sun—" gasped Anne Shirley.

"It was Flapjack's idea to begin with," said Slim, "but I put on the real fancy touches."

"Do you mean you fell through the ice—into the river?"

"That's just about it, ma'am," they agreed, "and we spent about two days dryin' out again."

In the afternoon when Flapjack and Billy were fishing Mrs. Shirley plowed through the snow to the cook-tent and finding Kansas and Slim alone she sat down.

"We want you boys to have dinner with us to-night," she said, going at once to her point. "But we've been looking at our tent and we couldn't possibly get you all inside, let alone feed you after we got you there. So we wanted to know if we could borrow this tent, bring our things and set them out here, that is. It seems like a queer kind of a party, but our tent is so small, and cluttered with beds and whatnot. At least I can promise you home cooking, for Anne is making some pies now."

"Mrs. Shirley," Kansas exclaimed, "you mustn't think of such a thing! Why, we'd eat up a week's supply of your grub."

"We're sure bottomless, when it comes to feedin'," corroborated Slim.

Mrs. Shirley laughed.

"I can imagine just how bottomless you are. But we're prepared for the worst, and we shan't use much of our supplies either. Mr. Shirley shot some of these big white rabbits and you just must help us to eat them up. Please say you'll lend us your tent. We've set our hearts on the party, all of us."

"You can have the tent and welcome, of course," said Kansas, "but only if you let us supply our own flour."

"We wouldn't feel right about it noway else," urged Slim.

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Mrs. Shirley looked from one to the other.

"Well, if you must make a bargain with me, we'll trade off the flour you may eat for the barley that Pegasus has already consumed." And with that she went off, laughing away any further protests.

She served them a meal they never forgot, beginning with potato soup, continuing with rabbit stew and tomatoes, flaky hot biscuit and blackberry jam, and topping off with coffee and apple pie. To be sure the tomatoes were canned, the apples were evaporated and the blackberry jam held icy splinters not quite thawed out, but to the hungry range riders, it was a perfect repast. Pack-saddle found the words to express their feeling.

"It's a pity, ma'am, you made that trade with the boss about this grub bein' an exchange for barley for Pegasus. That poor horse is due to eat barley now from here to the Klondike, and if he gets all that's paid for he's liable to founder on the way."

"Likewise," added Flapjack with his eyes on Anne, "it looks as if you'd have to camp near us most the time so Pegasus can collect what's owin' him."

"Mercy!" cried the girl. "What a dreadful prospect!"

The Shirleys were interested in the horses and they lingered for several hours asking how they had been caught and brought this far, and listening to the plans for their disposal. The preacher thought they might well be confident that the tough Wyoming breed could make it through to Dawson, in spite of the pessimism of men like Big Joe.

"They didn't know your horses," he declared, "nor your ways of handling them, so they could not judge. Look at the dead horses we have passed already! Naturally they thought horses couldn't stand this trail. But how many have you lost?"

"None," said Slim.

"None so far," amended Kansas.

"Exactly!" And Mr. Shirley beamed upon them all.

The horsewranglers in turn learned Shirley's history and plans. He had been preaching in a little town in Ohio when the news of the Klondike gold rush came.

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"Though there are less than twelve hundred people in Farnellville, we had five churches and this is about three too many. My father went to the California mines in eighteen-fifty, and I have never forgotten what he used to tell me. I believe that a preacher is more needed in Dawson than in Farnellville."

When he had made known his decision to his church, he had advised them to join with the Methodists, but the elders had chosen to call a young man from the seminary and to maintain their struggling existence. As soon as the successor had arrived the Shirleys had left for Edmonton, bearing with them gifts of apple butter and jam from old neighbors, and fifty dollars from the Ladies' Aid to be used to purchase a horse. Contrary to early information they had found horses high in price, and Shirley was no horsetrader. These two facts explained Pegasus.

"Still he's had a sense of responsibility to the Ladies' Aid," declared Mrs. Shirley. "He may have lain down quite a few times but he hasn't died."

When the horsewranglers lined out the next morning to take up their march they had the Shirleys and Pegasus with them.

On March twenty-third they crossed the Buffalo River, the outlet of the lake, to the north side of the Narrows, and camped near the village that had sprung up on Willow Point. After camp had been made the range riders went up to the unkempt little street straggling along the lake shore to see the sights. They intended, among other things, to try out the tables in the log poolhall whose sign they had noticed. They walked from end to end of the street and back again, in a fair crowd made up of Indians with scarlet kerchiefs twisted into a band and knotted about their heads and of half-breed trappers with the picturesque Assumption sashes beneath their mackinaws. There were only eight or ten houses bordering the road, but the trade from the near-by Indian farms gave business to several stores where eager Klondikers were replenishing their supplies. The stores were all operated by "outsiders," the Hudson's Bay Company post being located three miles further west on Buffalo Lake, and it was plain to see that the guid-

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ing spirit of the village at the Narrows was a jealous hostility to the "Company Town." None of the traders at the Narrows, however, had use for the horsewranglers' bobsled, and as Kansas was looking for a trade he left the others to their game of pool and went on to the post.

Three miles from the outlet the river widened into the semblance of a lake with a high bluff on the north side and a great stretch of hay meadow along the southern shore. In the shadow of the bluff Kansas found the Company's store and warehouses and a sawmill, idle now, but evidently busy in summer getting out lumber with power from a stream that poured down from the high land to the lake. From the factor Kansas learned that they could make a good bargain with their bobs. When he inquired, however, about adding to their store of feed he was told there was nothing to be had but hay, and that was worth twenty-five dollars a ton. All the Indians in that district had cattle and horses to be kept through the long winters and fodder was at a premium. Their stock would have no difficulty in living on the country for a long way now, the factor assured him, for the native grass was plentiful and very nutritious even at this time of year.

His information in hand, Kansas strolled up the path leading to the buildings of the Catholic Mission on the bluff, hoping he might get a view of the country, and he was not disappointed. When he had made his way to the edge of the bluff through the crowd of Indians gathered at the Mission for the Lenten services, a magnificent prospect was before him. The hay meadows he had seen from below spread out for a long distance to the south, cut across by ribbons of white which must be creeks and inlets covered with ice. Beyond them and far away like a dark border lay the forest. On his left hand to the east stretched the unbroken plain of Lesser Slave Lake, and from this height the bays and points made a pattern against the ice of dark and light, dazzling where the low afternoon sun was reflected from the freshly fallen snow. The air was clear and he could make out the table top of House Mountain that looked down upon the valley of the Swan.

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"We've come over quite a scope of country since we dried them beds in that cabin," he thought.

The horsewranglers lay over for two days at the narrows of Lesser Slave Lake. They were shifting their loads now from the sleds to the toboggans prepared for the softer going of spring, and the process required the disconnecting of poles and chains from one set of vehicles and readjusting them to the other. While they worked the parties of Klondikers came in and drove out, still insanely rushing with their failing stock. Many of them were planning to build boats at the Peace River eighty miles ahead, and if the horses died when they reached its banks, the problem of their disposal would at least be solved, as one cheerful prospector told Andrew Bell. He repeated this remark to Packsaddle, Kansas and Slim as the four were resting on an empty sled from which they had just removed a load of barley. With contemptuous profanity Kansas summed up the judgment of these plainmen.

"The lowest God-damned form of human is the man who abuses a horse!"

Slim drew "the makings" from his hip pocket and rolled himself a cigarette. His eyes rested idly on Flapjack who was hitching the team to the bobsled. He would be taking it to the post to turn in for the twenty dollars agreed upon by Kansas. He had Lovell's saddle pony tied to the tail-board and three saddles with their blankets lay in the sled. Slim considered these things and his companions followed his watching eyes.

"Flapjack shaved this mornin'," drawled Packsaddle, "and it ain't Sunday."

"That looks bad," averred Kansas.

"The Preacher went by headed toward the Company's town about a hour ago," announced Slim.

"With Miss Anne?" asked Andy Bell.

"With Miss Anne."

Flapjack was off, the team trotting smartly, the saddle pony clattering behind. The four on the sled rose as one, and Dad and Billy who had been working on a toboggan also gave their at-

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tention to the departing cook. Billy's eyes narrowed as he took in the detail of the saddle pony.

"Three horses," he said softly, "and one of 'em the gentlest in our bunch."

Something more than an hour later, Flapjack and the Shirleys walked through the Company's town accompanied by six clean-shaven men in their Sunday best. Kansas in the lead was telling Anne Shirley of the fine view from the Catholic Mission on the bluff, and the girl had decided they should all climb the hill. As the afternoon wore on, Flapjack made fruitless efforts to break the party into its original parts, but Anne Shirley, consciously or unconsciously, played into his partners' hands, and they finally rode back to their camp through the frosty twilight, all together.

"Haven't we had a wonderful time?" cried the girl joyously as she dismounted at her tent. She apparently did not notice the absence of Flapjack's voice in the general chorus of agreement.

During the preparation and the eating of the evening meal Flapjack Charlie maintained the same silence. He would not give his partners the satisfaction of hearing him expostulate, but neither could he bring himself to talk of other things. As soon as he was able he rolled into his blankets, and Kansas made a note in his pocket diary that he was keeping for Kitty, under date of "Thursday, March 24."

"Charley," wrote Kansas, "is Mad." And he spelled it with a capital M.

The following day dog-teams came through with the mail from Fort Nelson, and the Klondikers learned they could send letters out if they brought them to the Company's store. Kansas and Slim rode in with their mail, hoping also for a chance to talk with the drivers of the teams. But when their object was accomplished they received far from cheerful news. The road they were following ended at Fort St. John on the Peace River, the mailmen said, and even dogs could not take the trail to Fort Nelson after the thaw set in. The next mail would have to go around by the rivers, whatever that meant. It was hard to find out why this was so, for the dog-team

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drivers' English was limited, but they were both emphatic that horses could not go beyond St. John.

"What do you think?" asked Slim as they jogged back to camp.

"Sounds bad," admitted Kansas, "but since we've got this far, we'll go on to Fort St. John and look over the layout. No use throwin' down a good hand till you know for certain the cards is stacked."

As the others at camp agreed with this decision, they took the trail the next day, past the Hudson's Bay post and the Catholic Mission on its high bluff and the Church of England Mission in its pretty sheltered valley on the north shore, across Buffalo Lake and for two days through the Indian settlements to the grassy banks of South Heart River. Here Pegasus distinguished himself by escaping from the night-guard and with a bunch of the range horses setting out for home. Andy Bell and Billy Wilkinson chased the runaways clear to Lesser Slave Lake, but in the end they caught them and brought them back, overtaking the main camp by a big beaver dam on Bear Head Creek. That beaver dam was a revelation to the Americans. It was four or five feet high and the pond that it made was over a mile long. They saw no beaver, however, here or anywhere else through this district, and concluded they must have been trapped out.

The road was leading upward in a long ascent broken only by the sharp little valleys of the streams crossed, and the occasional muskegs or swamps masked in deep snow and fringed with the awkward skeletons of leafless larches, knotted with empty cones. The upper plateau was covered with timber, in fine stands of tall white poplar and in lines of willow on the creek banks, with here and there a stretch of open country like the lovely Little Prairie where the Hudson's Bay Company had their winter ranch for their work-cattle. The horsewranglers camped just beyond this clearing and after their supper they rode over to see the Company's farm. It was undoubtedly a fine outfit for forty head of stock, and they were particularly struck by Charley Anderson the half-breed who had charge, and whom they recognized as a good cattleman. On a common ground of knowledge they discussed the ways of

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horses and oxen, and listened with respect to this expert's advice on methods of combating the special perils of northern cold. Anderson, they agreed, was a fine man.

They came down on the upper end of the immense valley of the Big Heart River a few miles beyond their camp at Little Prairie and followed it for four miles, until it swept away to the south, wondering at the stretch of open country, the grassy flats by the river's side, and the sheltering hills that broke the force of the wind.

"Snow ain't nothin' like so deep as it was around Lesser Slave Lake," observed Slim.

Kansas nodded.

"Perfect country for ranchin'," he agreed. "Ain't it surprisin' that only one young Frenchman has come in to take up land!"

"Of course," remarked Andy Bell, "it's a hell of a ways from anywhere. But that sure won't keep settlers out long."

A day later they reached the crest of the Breaks of Peace River.

"Oh, boys, boys!" cried Anne Shirley. And indeed they were all ready to stand and gaze.

A mile away and nearly a thousand feet down lay the river, here a narrow ribbon of white, there a wideness like a lake with dark wooded islands on its breast, reach succeeding reach to a haze-filled V on the far northeastern horizon. At their feet the Big Heart River came in again from the southwest, a smooth sheet of ice between low cliffs topped by heavily timbered sloping banks, and a few miles further up was the rugged notch where the Smoky wound out of the west to join the Peace through a maze of islands. These three great valleys cut deep into the high prairie on which the travelers stood, majestic witnesses to the age-long force of the streams, but they could not break the tremendous sweep of the plateau, seemingly boundless to west and south and north. When the men's eyes dropped again to the river that was to be their road, the tiny black figures that were parties of Klondikers building boats or traveling on the ice seemed impertinent intruders on a silent waste. A nameless foreboding more instinctive than

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thought laid a spell on them all. Men were insignificant and alien here.

At Peace River Landing several parties of Klondikers were camped. They were building boats to be ready to take to the river when the ice should go out, and they stared in amazement at the Wyoming horses and their drivers. The snow was gone from the hills and little remained even in the sheltered hollows of the river bank, they pointed out to the newcomers, and the trail which crossed the river and continued to Fort St. John on the north side was said to be very rough. They expressed their opinion that the party would do well to camp here, and prophesied nothing but evil when they persisted in trusting themselves to the river-ice as long as it might last.

But the horsewranglers, unheeding, busied themselves with preparations for an early start. They brought over to the Shirleys' camp three saddle animals: the riding mule, that Kansas had been using in alternation with Roman Nose, for the preacher, Lovell's pony for Mrs. Shirley, and a gentle little black that they called Peanut for Anne. The preacher would have refused to take this help but they were insistent.

"We got to reach Fort St. John before this ice goes out," declared Slim. "And we can't none of us waste time walkin'."

"And we sure couldn't expect no luck at all if we left you and the ladies to shift for yourselves," explained Flapjack.

"Not considerin' all the barley we still owe Pegasus," added Kansas.

"You can't put that sort of a jinx on our trip, Preacher," pleaded Packsaddle. "It wouldn't be Christian."

But Mr. Shirley continued to shake his head.

"You boys are too kind, but we are not willing to take your horses."

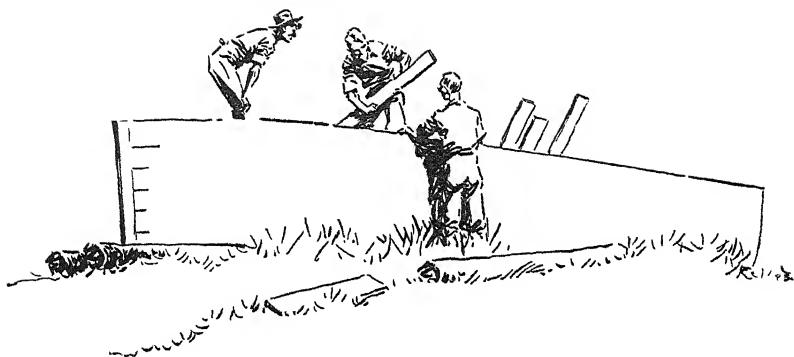
"We're not jokin', Mr. Shirley," declared Kansas. "We're goin' to need your help. We'll have over forty animals under pack when we have to give up the toboggans and we're short-handed with only six riders. One of us will always have to wrangle loose stock. If

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you three ride along with us there won't be no temptation for them animals to get out of line."

"Kansas Gilbert!" cried Anne. "Where do you expect to go when you die?"

With clear eyes and solemn faces the cowpunchers assured her that they spoke "God's truth." Four horses would trail a leader easily, but seven made too long a string. In the end the Shirleys gave in, and the horsewranglers had acquired a family.



Chapter VII

THEY FOLLOW SOME EXCELLENT ADVICE

ON April first the long line of toboggans started up the river. The day was fine but warmer than the travelers would have wished, as by noon the water from the melting snow running down upon the ice kept the horses at a snail's pace, and long before the afternoon was over the party was forced to camp. With these handicaps they made slow headway. All along from the Landing up past the mouth of the Smoky River they saw the little Indian farms on the north side, and everywhere Klondikers were building their boats. Now and then they overtook men they had seen before. There was the Good Hope Party that had passed them just beyond the Athabaska River, who recognized their outfit and shouted greetings at them from the shore. It gave a friendly feeling to this wilderness.

Seen from the ice where they were traveling the high river banks were like parallel ridges against the sky.

"They look just like mountains, don't they?" observed Anne Shirley to Flapjack, "shutting us in with these fenced fields and the folks we know on the river, telling us this is a world where we belong. It's easy to forget the bigness of that plateau up there."

"Forget?" echoed Flapjack. "Do you want to forget it?"

"Yes, I do. It's—it's too big. Don't you feel it's too big for us?"

"No," said the cowpuncher slowly. "But I guess I'm used to big country."

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They passed the Hudson's Bay post with the ruined fort of its old rival the Northwest Company across from it, and there was no one to tell them Mackenzie had built the first of those ruined buildings in 1792 as the winter headquarters from which he prepared for his expedition to the Pacific Ocean. They passed the well-kept buildings of the Catholic Mission opposite the mouth of Smoky River, and, six miles further along, the older Church of England Mission near Brisk's store. Here were the last of the farms and here they traded off Glass Eye, an unruly range horse, for a supply of fine potatoes.

After thirty miles of fairly straight going the river began to twist. They rounded the Great Bend, a long hairpin turn around a high hill. They threaded between islands where countless flocks of ducks and geese were settling to their summer housekeeping, and on April sixth they passed through a wooded gorge with walls seven hundred feet high and came out before the flat of Dunvegan. Close under the shelter of the bluff was the Catholic Mission with its fine garden, just beyond was the Hudson's Bay Company's shop and warehouse and two stores run by "outsiders," and a gunshot further along where Island Creek joined the river old fireplaces and sagging spruce bark roofs marked the old fort now in ruins.

At the post the horsewranglers learned that the river above this point was rapid and that they must expect extremely treacherous going, if not actual open water. Accordingly they changed their methods of travel and went into camp early in the afternoon. The nights were still freezing and at daybreak the surface water on the river ice was usually solid. They had determined, therefore, to take advantage of the light of the full moon and to start each day's march in the small hours of the morning, hoping in this way to reach Fort St. John before the spring rains and the softening ice should bring them to a halt.

For sixty miles they plodded on with the river valley growing increasingly deep. One afternoon when Kansas was out hunting on the north shore he estimated the icy road they were traveling must be twelve hundred feet below the crest of the table-land. Sometimes the river filled the bottom of this gorge from side to side, and

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the men must dismount and lead their horses around the sidling ice of the bends. More often, as at Dunvegan, a flat terrace extended back from the water on the north side to the steep ascent to the upper country, or a series of rounded steps led to the higher level. The southern side of the valley was usually steep and always heavily timbered, but the northern shore was open and grassy or covered with low bushes and occasional clumps of aspen. Here and there landslides bared horizontal streaks of brilliant color, red, buff, pale yellow and gray-blue, and sometimes for days there were long parallel lines of low cliffs like stone palisades holding the hills in separate terraces.

The early afternoon camping gave opportunity and leisure for many things. Some one always went hunting—now it was Kansas, now Dad and the Preacher who had formed a defensive alliance against their younger companions. Some explored the incoming creeks and brought back tales of deserted Indian camps and of Indian ponies fat and frisky in spite of a winter in the open. Mrs. Shirley and Anne roamed the woods of the southern shore, sniffing the good smell of wet earth and hunting for the first signs of green. And one day they all gathered round while Kansas and Andy Bell panned out some gravel taken from the bed of a noisy creek that had broken its covering of ice. They swirled the water with a rocking motion that they hoped was professional, but they got nothing for their pains. It was good practice in panning, however, and they all tried it in turn even to Anne and Mrs. Shirley.

Then came days when the horses began to break through the ice, when rapids were open and visibly gnawing at the icy roof of the pools in which they ended; and finally on April thirteenth the sounder, Slim, who was going ahead to test the thickness of the ice, pronounced further progress impossible. At the mouth of a large creek they made their camp in the timber of the south shore where lumber would be available for their boats.

Several parties of Klondikers were already settled on the north shore near a trapper's gray cabin, where the rasping of saws and the ringing of hammers testified to the boatbuilding that was going forward. A few men ceased from their work and gathered on the

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bank to gaze in curiosity at the horses. Suddenly two of them rushed, shouting, waving, across the ice. They were members of the Norris Party who had camped with the horsewranglers at Lesser Slave Lake, weeks before. It was like a meeting of old friends. Scores of questions must be asked and answered until the experiences of both parties had been brought up to date. In the course of the conversation the horsewranglers learned that they were camped at Bear Creek, that Fort St. John was about sixty miles further up the river, and that the inhabitant of the gray cabin was Jack Graham, an old timer in the North.

"He's off somewhere just now," volunteered a tall man from Chicago, "but he'll be over to see you when he gets back. He can tell you for certain what to do about the horses, for what he doesn't know about this neck of the woods isn't worth knowing."

After a day of scouting about up the valley of Bear Creek and through the high country above the river, Slim and Kansas chose the place to put the horses. There was a little lake that would give them water, as the ice had thawed around its edge, and there were natural pastures about the lake where a heavy stand of last year's hay would give ample fodder until the new grass should spring. A belt of timber beyond these meadows would afford shelter on its fringes from storm, and yet was too thick to encourage wandering, and the high hills that surrounded the valley on every side would be an additional barrier. With Andy Bell they moved the horses over to this feeding ground, reserving Packsaddle's mules to help snake logs down to the creek bank for the building of their boats.

Under the bank of Bear Creek they set up four sawpits, frame-works made of two parallel logs raised seven feet above the ground on posts, with a long log skidway leading to each frame. Logs were piled at the end of each skid and rolled up three at a time to lie across the supporting frame. Then one man mounted the frame and standing on the logs, marked a straight line down the middle one. He then set the long double saw at the end of the line and his job was to pull up on the saw and keep it moving along the line while his partner from his position underneath the frame pulled down and gave the muscle to the stroke.

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"Preacher," said Slim, as the men were pairing off the first morning, "it don't much matter who you works with, but we're all agreed you stands on top. Then your callin' will be all to the good."

"How so, Slim?" asked Mr. Shirley.

"You got to follow a straight line, Preacher, without turnin' to the right hand nor to the left if you're on top. But the man underneath with the sawdust fallin' in his eyes and down his neck, he needs language, various and red-hot."

They were getting out the lumber for two boats in which they planned to take their stuff up the river. They wanted to get the work done before the river should be open, and that they might lose no time, they allowed themselves no respite save that afforded by changing from sawing to chopping, working up a few logs and then going to get more.

One afternoon as they were about to knock off work for the day they saw a tall, stout man on the creek bank above them watching them with a glint of amusement in his eyes. He wore a heavy woolen cap with a covered visor that shaded his face, and a dark mackinaw that was now unbuttoned showing the gleam of a scarf about an immense waist. He carried a long-barreled rifle with the stock resting in the crook of his elbow, and so far, except for his weight, he looked like all the other trappers they had seen, but they noticed with amazement that he wore riding boots with high tops.

"Howdy, boys," was his greeting. "I'm Jack Graham from across the river. I heard you have a bunch of horses, and I've come to talk with you about 'em."

"If that's your idea you must eat with us," declared Kansas. "You are just the man we've been lookin' for and we're sure full of questions we want to ask you."

They scrambled up the bank and with the trapper walked over to the cook-tent. During the preparation of the meal Mr. Graham took the lead in the questioning.

"I'm interested in horses," he explained. "You may know they call me around here 'Cayuse' Graham. Never walk if I can ride. Used to ride for my livin' before I took up trappin'. It's a great

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trade, ridin', but I've got the North in my blood now, and it's worse than whiskey for holdin' a man."

He wanted to know the size of the herd, and how they were standing the road, the amount of feed the men had left and what methods they had used in bringing their animals along the winter trail. As he listened he nodded in approval. Dinner came as an interruption, but when it was over, and the trapper had tamped down some tobacco in a battered Hudson's Bay pipe, they took up the subject again.

"Are you aiming to slaughter the horses when you get there or sell 'em for work-stock?"

"There's more money in work-stock, from what I've heard," said Slim.

"I suppose there would be; but in that case you ought to be there in the spring or early summer, and you can't make it this year."

"We can't!" they chorused aghast.

"Lord love you, no! I don't know how far it is, but it must be near a thousand miles as a crow flies, and horses ain't crows. Figure it out for yourselves. When you get to St. John you have come about six hundred miles from Edmonton, and you've had a road to travel on. You may not even get to Dawson next year for you can't go beyond St. John with horses in the summer. I know because I took a party of men in there last summer. We finally got to the headwaters of the Fort Nelson River, but we was in canoes, and on the portage it took us thirty days to get around one muskeg that we can cross in four days in the winter."

The horsewranglers stared at each other.

"To tell you the truth, boys, if you want to get to the Klondike before the best of the mining country is staked out, you'd better turn out your horses right here, and take the Company's road yourselves. The freight for that country goes down this river and through Great Slave Lake to the Mackenzie. Near the mouth of the Mackenzie there's a pass to the headwaters of the Yukon. It's a long way round but, as the old saying has it, you'll find it the shortest way home."

"I've got a Canadian guide-book," protested Slim, "that says

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there's a Company road from St. John to Fort Nelson and on to Fort Selkirk on the Yukon."

Graham laughed.

"There's a winter mail-trail from here to Fort Nelson all right. That's the road we took last summer. Beyond that the Company uses the rivers. There are posts along the Liard and in the Dease Lake country, and there used to be a traverse from there over to Fort Selkirk, but that post was abandoned nearly fifty years ago."

"Then probably that road ain't much good now," observed Slim.

"Well, as I said, the Company's freight goes around by the rivers," returned the trapper. "The Liard River is swift, they say, and dangerous too. It takes a light canoe to go up it. You could never raft your horses. If you've set your minds on taking 'em, my advice would be that you stay this summer at Fort St. John. You could get enough work freighting to pay for two years' supplies. You may not need that much but you ought to take it to be safe. Then start out as soon as the ground is froze hard. You ought to get to Fort Nelson before the snow gets too deep for the horses. You could wait there and feed your stock till the crust forms along in February and then go on following the rivers. You might get through to the Yukon headwaters. I don't say you wouldn't because I don't know the country. But you certainly could reach the Dease Lake district. They have stock in there, I've heard, so they must have pastures of some sort where you can hold your herd next summer if you need to. Then you'll have all winter to chop out that fifty-year-old road."

"Judgin' from the choppin' we done in the Athabaska country," declared Packsaddle ruefully, "we may need a whole winter to the job."

"Boys," said Kansas, "me and Slim got you into this jam. Them horses was our idea. I'm willin' to turn 'em out right here. It wouldn't be square to hold the rest of you back for one year, leave alone two. How about it, Slim?"

"That goes with me," assented Slim. "We can finish our boats and take to the river as soon as the ice goes out."

"I ain't satisfied to do that," said Packsaddle slowly. "Them

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mules of mine has took me through tight places a-plenty, and I just can't turn 'em out to starve or freeze. I ain't speakin' for the rest of you. You better go on down the river, but me and the mules is tryin' our luck overland. We may die, but the chances is we'll die together."

"Is your mind set on that, Packsaddle?" asked Kansas.

"It sure is, Kansas. I can't do nothin' else."

"How do the rest of you boys feel?" asked Slim. "Would you rather go down river now, or try to see the horses through?"

"Well," said Andy Bell, "as I make it out we can't get to the Klondike nohow much before fall."

"Probably not, since you're packing supplies," agreed Graham.

"And if we all of us stayed with the horses," continued Andy, "and was on hand for the choppin' we'd most likely get them through in one year. It don't sound reasonable that men could do much minin' in that frozen country in the winter. So I don't know but what we'd be just as far ahead to get there in the spring with horses to sell."

"That's what I think," said Dad, and Flapjack and Billy were evidently of the same opinion.

"Then it looks as though we might as well all stick together," remarked Kansas.

"In that case there's one other thing to think about," the trapper declared. "How do you figure on feeding and caring for the horses when you get them to Dawson?"

"What?" The horsewranglers were plainly bewildered.

"It's a sure thing there ain't any hay meadows around a mining camp. Them that bring in horses for the summer working season probably take fodder to last until they slaughter in the fall, but they won't have enough extra to feed sixty head. You won't be able to sell very many if you can't point out some way they can be fed."

"Well?" queried Kansas.

"You'd better send some of your party ahead, around by the river, to stake out a pasture for you. Even if they get there too late

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to collect any hay they can arrange with the traders to bring in the feed you may need on the first boats."

This sounded sensible and there remained only to decide who should be sent ahead.

"As to that there ain't no question at all," said Packsaddle. "I claims to know how to get animals around the country, but traders and pastures and feed-buyin' in large lots is out of my line. That's work for them as has experience in shippin' cattle, which means you, Kansas, and Slim."

Two days after this momentous conference when the men were working in their sawpits they heard a tremendous reverberating roar. Dropping their saws they rushed over to the river bank. Where before the ice had stretched an unbroken sheet it was now in a thousand pieces, and as they looked these fragments began to shift and heave, sliding one under the other, turning and twisting, upending and dropping again, moving slowly downstream. After a time the men returned to their work, but Anne Shirley and her mother sat on by the river watching the toppling, surging ice fragments and listening to the groan and crash of their motion.

For a day and a night the ice moved by, then its speed began to slacken. A barrier commenced to form reaching out into the stream from the island at the mouth of Bear Creek. Slower and slower grew the movement until at last it ceased altogether. The jam from Bear Creek extended across the river, and for three days the ice was still, except for occasional roaring shifts that only piled the jam higher and raised the level of the whole surface above this accidental dam. The river was in flood beneath the ice, and here and there it burst through a crevice and played like a fountain until some new adjustment closed the vent.

The men finished their sawing and began to plane their boards and still the dam of ice held, though distant crashing upstream told of greater floods descending. There was a snowstorm that stopped their work and sent them out with rifles after the ducks and geese on the now open reaches of the lake in the horses' pasture. They flushed partridges in the woods and saw a bear's track, broad and black on the thin spring snow, and on the third day Dad stopped

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his plane, looked fixedly at the back of his hand and then slapped something viciously.

"A mosquito! And the ice ain't out of the river!" he complained.

But that night with earth-shaking thunder the jam went out and the following day the men set up the frame for the first and largest of their boats. They had finished the planking, had collected pitch and boiled it down for Kansas who was caulking her hull, and had set up the second frame before the river was completely clear. On the opposite shore near the trapper Graham's cabin parties were making ready to leave. One group of men, copying the Indians, had built travois for their dogs, vehicles consisting of two dragging shafts with a network slung between to carry the burden. These loaded up their small draft animals and started up the trail.

Jack Graham launched his canoe and came across to the horse-wranglers' camp. His object in visiting them was to urge them not to start yet.

"Some fools over at my place will be pulling out any day now, and I don't want you to make the same mistake. This ice that's just gone through ain't a circumstance to what's coming. There's a canyon up above Fort St. John that dams all the ice in the upper river and she usually holds for four or five days after we're clear here. If you start you'll only have to take to the shore in a hurry somewhere, and if you're not right at a good landing-place you're liable to lose some of your stuff, no matter how fast you move."

"Looks like we better wait till the big gorge goes through, then," grinned Packsaddle.

"But we're sure goin' to be ready to travel as soon as she passes," asserted Slim.

"You needn't hurry about starting downstream," returned the trapper. "The whole thing jams again below Dunvegan."

"That wooded gorge!" ejaculated Kansas.

"That's the place. And it makes a flood here as is a flood. If you wait until that high water starts to fall and go down just behind the crest of it you'll overtake those that start ahead of you."

They finished the big boat, wedging in the mast on an afternoon

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when a loon circled and dove in the calm water behind the island, observing their activity with eerie laughter.

"He don't think much of this boat of yours, Dad," observed Kansas.

"We're the ones that will be laughin' when we get it launched," retorted the older man.

And true to the boast the craft floated steady and on even keel when at last they shoved it into the water. Jack Graham came over and they all took a ride on the sunset reaches of the river with Anne and Mrs. Shirley seated in state on the after thwart just ahead of the steersman. It was a keen pleasure to get away from the swarming mosquitoes of their camp, and move to the alternate dip and drip of oars through the rose and green and gold of the water in a boat of their own making. Slim began singing "Swanee River" and the girl's voice rose like a thread of silver, weaving through the rich harmony of the men. Only the chill of night coming early in the deep river valley drove them ashore.

They drew the boat part way up its skids in the shelter of Bear Creek, and the following day loaded it with the feed, the pack-saddles and the extra provisions. The small boat which was to take the tents and outfit needed on the way to Fort St. John was nearing completion and the men not busy working on her gathered pitch and boiled it down for the caulking. They worked until dark, and after supper Flapjack strolled over to the Shirleys' tent to sit for a long time by the smudge-fire the Preacher had built. The others could hear that some sort of earnest conversation was going on, and when Flapjack returned they saw his face was dark with concern.

"Kansas," he burst out, as they were climbing into their bedrolls in the sleeping-tent, "what do you think the Preacher is plannin' to do?"

"Give it up!"

"He says he's goin' to leave us when we reach St. John and travel on alone."

"The hell he is!" cried Slim.

"He must be crazy," said Andy Bell. "What's his reason?"

"He says he ought to get to the Klondike as soon as possible.

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He's always thinking about his dad's stories of minin' camps, and how preachers must be needed in Dawson."

"Did you tell him what Jack Graham said about the road?" asked Kansas.

"I told him everythin' I could think of," groaned Flapjack. "But he's thought it out real careful. He's used to a canoe, he says, and so is Miss Anne. They're going to trade off Pegasus at the fort and get them a canoe, or maybe two canoes, I don't know. And they're goin' down the rivers. They figure on tradin' the canoes for dogs to get them over that portage to the Yukon that Graham talked about. The Preacher he studied them travois that Durks built and he thinks they'll be just the thing to do the trick. Then at the other side they'll trade the dogs for canoes again. He says, of course, they must be a post up there where the Hudson's Bay people shift their freight."

"It's a wonder he ain't aimin' to carry the canoes over the Divide, him and Miss Anne," snorted Packsaddle.

"The thing is," went on Flapjack, "he can't realize he ain't as strong as he once was. Of course he ain't old, but he ain't so young neither. Kansas, that girl ain't got a chance in the world of comin' through alive if they sets out alone."

"What's your idea, Flapjack?"

"I know I said I'd cook for you clear to the Klondike, Kansas. But I'm askin' you to turn me loose from that promise right here. If that old fool is set on draggin' them women through this country I'm goin' along. I got my time you paid me for the round-up and I'll get the grub I need at Fort St. John. It ain't keepin' my bargain I made with you, but I didn't figure on this sort of thing. If you and Slim is travelin' light you don't need me like you did, and, Packsaddle, you can have my share of the grub to pay you for losin' my services, if you was countin' on 'em. I'm hopin' you'll say it's all right with you, but I'm goin' whatever you say."

"It's all right with me, boy," said Kansas.

"If you hadn't thought of somethin' like this, I'd a booted you all around this camp," declared Packsaddle. "We ain't a-goin' to have nothin' happen to Miss Anne."

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Shortly after midnight the horsewranglers were roused by Shirley who was banging on their tent-ropes and calling.

"Boys! The river is full of ice!" he shouted. "It's backing up Bear Creek inlet and it looks as if it might get the boat."

They jumped for their boots and rushed out throwing on their clothes as they ran. Towering hummocks of ice, filling the river from bank to bank, were sweeping downstream. Smaller pieces caught by the point of the island were being pushed up into the mouth of the creek by the rush of the greater stream, and the boat as it lay was in danger. Working in a frenzy of haste they unloaded to the high bank, then dragged the empty boat as far up its skids as it could go. This was all they could do until they got more skids, torn from the sawpits. Then they rigged a pulley and hauled the boat bodily up to the top of the bank. The unfinished little boat which lay further upstream they left where it was, for it would be an easy matter for them all to move it in an emergency. Meanwhile they watched the river and the advancing line of ice along the creek.

Under the gray light of dawn they made out strange things, a mass of ice as large as trapper Graham's cabin moving majestic along, surrounded by an acre of tiny pieces the products of some colossal grinding process, trees coming down with the earth still clutched in their torn roots, logs frayed and splintered as if they had been catapulted against rocks, the carcass of a dead bear, and a great black bird with a white breast, perched on an icy pinnacle and riding solemnly, steadying itself with an occasional flap of its wings, as the ice fragment lurched and slid.

"There goes that loon," said Dad Wilkinson. "He's caught him a boat for his own self, since he seen how well ours rode."

"That ice has sure come from where the river was froze to the bottom," observed Packsaddle. "Look at the black sand on it!"

The day wore by, and the men finished the little boat between stretches of watching the river. All night they slept to uneasy dreams punctuated by the groans and crashing of the passing ice, but on the morning of May first the river was again clear, and they felt it must be safe to start upstream.

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Spring had come overnight as spring does in the North. Buds were bursting on the willows and the fluff of the Balm of Gilead trees floated on the air up Bear Creek valley as the men rode in to the lake to round up the horses. The big boat was dragged down to the river and once more loaded. Six months' supplies were set aside for Kansas and Slim, and the little boat, being lifted over the piled ice at the creek mouth, would have been filled with all the rest of the outfit, had not the Wilkinsons asked to have their grub held out.

"We'll stay and build the boat for Kansas," said Dad, "and we may prospect and hunt around here a bit before we join you at the fort. If you're goin' to be there all summer we don't have to hurry."

But they all made common cause of getting Packsaddle and his party on their way. Mrs. Shirley and Anne were given seats on top of the load, Andrew Bell took the steersman's place, while Dad with the Preacher, and Flapjack with Billy paired off at the oars. Packsaddle in the stern beside Andy seized the headstall which he had fastened on his saddle mare. The mules were then driven down to the shore and the signal was given for the oarsman to start. They rowed out from shore and the mules, seeing their master and the bell-mare leaving, plunged into the icy water. Kansas and Slim urged the drove of wild horses to follow. They snorted and kicked, but the riders would not allow them to head back to shore, and as soon as they felt themselves beyond their depth and swimming, they struck out pluckily in the wake of the boat. The men rowed out and into the current of the river which swept them down and across to the shore by Graham's cabin. When Kansas and Slim were certain that the last of the horses was safely beyond the point of return, they dismounted and launched the little boat which they rowed across to join the others, towing their saddle ponies with them. When they reached the opposite shore they found Jack Graham in conference with Packsaddle. Both looked anxious.

"I had no idea you would have to load her so heavy," the trapper was saying. "You can't ever get her upstream like that at this time of year with only four men."

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"We was countin' on usin' my team a six mules and towin' her up in the slack water along the shore," explained Packsaddle. "We hadn't no thought of rowin' except just enough to keep her straight."

"Lord love you, man!" cried Graham: "You can't drive a team along the shore of Peace River in the spring flood! She's bank-full, and the banks are the roughest things you ever saw."

"How does the Company get its freight up to Fort St. John?" asked Kansas. "I understand they use boats."

"They do, but they would have a crew of ten or twelve men to a boat this size. They'd track it up, 'line' it, tow it, you know, from the shore. But it can't be done with mules or any other animal except a man. Most of the time the crew is in the water, and where they can take to the bank it's so slimy that a man uses his hands as well as his feet. And there's trees, you know, half in the water and half out, where you have to creep under or else crawl over. Your mules are smart, Packsaddle, but this is something they can't do."

"I guess that's right," admitted the freighter reluctantly.

"It's hard to believe we couldn't row it," remarked Mr. Shirley, "when it went upstream so easily at the trial the other night."

The trapper smiled.

"I kept you in the backwater behind the islands when you started back upstream, Preacher. If you could take islands all the way to St. John it might be done, but your backs would ache with this load even in slack water."

"Well, boys, here's where we unload," announced Packsaddle. "We can strike the pack-trail to the fort from here, can't we, Graham?"

"A path leads up to it from my cabin."

"Any of you Klondikers want a good boat?" asked the freighter. "She goes fine downstream. Graham here knows because he helped us try her."

"I reckon me and my pardners might make a dicker with you," drawled a lanky individual from on top of the bank. "We're a-goin' to need a second boat an' it's a heap easier to buy it than make it."

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"Kansas," said Packsaddle, "I expect you and Slim can use the little boat. Save you time buildin' another. Unless Dad here wants to take it for his share of the sale of the big one, and his wages for makin' yours."

"Better let Dad take it," advised Graham. "I can show you a trick or two in setting up the frame of a boat for 'white water' that'll save you a lot of trouble down-river."

In this way it was finally arranged and Packsaddle departed to make his bargain with the tall Klondiker while the others fell to the task of unloading the boats, assembling the freight into packs and catching and loading the horses. Noon had come before all was ready, and after the hasty meal, Kansas sought out Flapjack.

"I'd take it as a favor," he said, "if you'd ride Roman Nose. He won't feel so strange if he's carryin' a man from the home ranch."

Flapjack nodded.

"I'll do it, boss," he said, and he went off to bring in the Lovell pony and Peanut for Mrs. Shirley and Anne.

"Mrs. Shirley," said Slim, "it looks like you and your daughter is horsewranglers right, now, and you ought to have a proper send-off. We ain't got no whiskey handy, and probably you wouldn't take it if we had a barrel. But anyhow we can say, 'Mush along!'"

"Mush along?" Mrs. Shirley plainly did not understand.

"It don't mean nothin' to most people," explained Kansas. "It's just a bit of private language we've had on this trip. I guess the nearest you could come to the meanin' would be 'So long' with a sort of 'God keep you' idea mixed in."

"That's about it," agreed Slim. "And it's only said to horsewranglers."



Chapter VIII

TWO BECOME BOATMEN

N EARLY two weeks had gone by since Packsaddle and the rest had left and still Kansas and Slim were camped at the mouth of Bear Creek. Their boat which had been built under Jack Graham's constant supervision was completed, and had been tested out in a trip upstream. She had negotiated the eddies and current at the mouth of the creek with credit, but developed balkiness under sail, which necessitated certain alterations before she was pronounced by the expert fit for running the rapids and navigating the Great Slave Lake. Now she lay on the bank sheltered by the trees from the sun which at noon was hot, and waiting for the signal to take to the water.

But still the signal was delayed, for the river was yet rising. An ice jam somewhere below was evidently damming the flood water and the crest of the freshet had not come although the season was advancing. The wind was now languorous on sunny days, now chill with fine driving rain, but both warmth and moisture brought out the living things. Kansas found flowers around the spring that were strange to him and he pressed them in his diary to send to Kitty when he should have a chance to write. He found the track of a red deer too, and caught a glimpse of a bear lifting a log in search of ants. He was cook for the outfit now and often tramped in to

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the lake for ducks, or spread a net for the fish that were too busy in the turbid stream to take a baited hook or a fly. He had time when food supplies were laid in to look over his equipment, to mend and wash his clothes, and as he flapped and swashed his garments on the stones of the creek, he watched two great white swans floating in the slack water back of the island, searching the shore for a place to build a nest. The woods were so still, now that the other parties of Klondikers had gone, that birds and beasts were moving about on their own affairs unhindered.

The nearest neighbors that Kansas and his partners had were a small encampment of Indians beyond the birch woods on the river bend. There the women had tapped the trees and hung their birch-bark buckets to catch the dripping birch sap. They were making sugar while the men were gone with Graham to Edmonton to pack out his winter's catch of fur. The trapper had left as soon as his packers had arrived, and now the only passers were those who normally followed the river. The Hudson's Bay boat went down to Dunvegan and gave a chance to send out mail. "The Dutchman," a prospector who had been working the river bars for years, stopped with them for a night, and talked enthusiastically of "colors" along the Peace, both above and below Fort St. John, while Dad Wilkinson and Billy, thinking of a profitable summer occupation, listened with interest. He camped for a time across the river near Graham's cabin, prospecting a near-by bar, and now and again one or another went out to watch him at his work.

One evening the Dutchman crossed over from his camp with another man in his boat. The stranger on near view had the heavy pack, the moccasin boots, the mackinaw jacket and the vivid sash of a trapper. The Dutchman introduced him.

"Boys, here iss Doc, a trapper vat vorks dis country. He yust lose his canoe a vays back on der river, and ven he comes by Yack Graham und finds dot he iss gone to Edmonton yet already, he iss beginning to built himself again anudder canoe. So I tells him dot you boys iss going down by der river, und maybe you feel glad to haf mit you a man vot knows der country, yes?"

"I don't wan' say I run your 'eavy boat trough all de rapide."

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said Doc the Trapper, "but I can tak' you trough some of dem. I know all de portage', and I see you get good guide' w'ere you need dem. Myself, I honly go to Fort Wrigley, but ees no bad water on Mackenzie after dat. Besides you be good river-men, yourself, w'en you been down Peace an' Slave."

"Stranger," said Kansas, "you're sure welcome to a seat in that boat, particular if you thinks you can steer."

"You bet!" added Slim feelingly. "Me and Kansas will guarantee to put her through the water but the fine points of steerin' ain't in our line."

The four strolled down to look at the boat, the lines of which Doc said were good, then they investigated the marker the boys had set up to measure the rise of the river.

"She's near six feet higher than she was when we got here," observed Slim.

"She's close on de turn den," said the Trapper.

"That's all right with us," returned the cowpuncher. "We're rarin' to go."

By the twelfth of May the level of the water had become stationary as shown by their measuring-rod, and several parties from Fort St. John camped with them for the night. Some of the newcomers were bound for Dunvegan, others were utterly discouraged or lacked funds to continue on the lengthening way and were headed for home. On the fifteenth of May, Doc the Trapper declared the time had come to start and accordingly they struck camp. Dad Wilkinson and Billy moved their supplies over to the Dutchman's camp while Kansas and Slim loaded their boat. The faint haze of a forest fire had been hanging over the valley for days, masking the farther reaches of the river in veils of blue. Through this fairy vista in the mid-afternoon the Wyoming men, with the Trapper steering, dropped downstream. The river swept on, resistless, gleaming, marked by the changing surface swirls and eddies of the tremendous undercurrent, silent save for the occasional rapids between its islands. The Trapper navigated their craft into the black channel between the lines of white, and for the first time the Americans felt the exhilarating lift and swoop of a boat in fast

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water. They rowed until dusk found them thirty miles below their camping-place.

The smoke of the fire was thick and heavy when they pushed out from the bank at daybreak, touching their faces with a palpable heat and stinging their eyelids, and presently they came upon the place of its passing, a black, smoldering hillside with the glowing spear points of the burning tree-trunks marking the crest of the valley. They reached Dunvegan in the morning, where the Trapper had business to transact. Parties of Klondikers had paused here in the difficult ascent of the river in flood, and from among these came a hail.

"Hi! Cowpunchers! Where are your horses?"

Kansas and Slim turned to see two men from the Good Hope Party standing by a small boat they had evidently been about to shove out into the stream.

"The rest of the boys took 'em to Fort St. John," said Kansas. "They're goin' overland in the fall."

"We're goin' around by the river," added Slim, "to get feed and pasture ready for 'em. Where's the rest of your crowd?"

"They went overland from here nearly a month ago."

"Overland? Thought you were all building boats when we passed you in April!"

"We were, but we heard about this overland trail from here that sounded shorter than the river. Did you say your horses were at Fort St. John, now?"

"Well, we hope they are. They was headed that way when we last seen 'em two weeks ago."

The two Good Hope men exchanged significant glances.

"We've got about a year's supplies coming to Fort St. John from Edmonton with the Company's first boats," explained one of them, "and we shall be needing a pack-train to get them on to where we expect to overtake the party. But we must go as fast as we can travel, we can't wait until fall. Would your men be open to a proposition of that kind?"

"If there's any way of goin' ahead now," declared Kansas, "Pack-

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saddle will be for burnin' up the trail. But it's only fair to tell you, we've heard it can't be done."

"There's a rumor here that the new police trail has been carried beyond St. John."

"If that's only true we're all in luck, for the longer that trail is, the easier the traveling will be on them horses of ours."

"Here comes the Trapper," said Slim. "We'll have to be movin' on."

"You won't make no mistake tyin' to Packsaddle," said Kansas in parting. "He's a old hand at freightin' and knows the game thorough."

For two days they swept downstream at the rate of a hundred miles in a day, passing Peace River Landing on the second morning after they had left Bear Creek.

"This is sure travelin'!" exulted Slim. "It took us two weeks to go up that stretch of river!"

On the left the vast bank of the river rose in rounded treeless slopes covered with grass and dimpled with hollows filled with berry bushes in their first young green, with low-growing aspens tremulous in the wind and with the occasional lithe wild cherry. The east bank was clothed from the river's edge to skyline in a forest of spruce, still dark and lifeless in winter dress.

"It's just like Miss Anne said to Flapjack. It's sure hard to remember that them banks ain't mountains," observed Kansas, as they sat together in the stern of the boat which was flying along under a stiff breeze. "Who'd ever guess from here there was all that prairie-land up there and lakes and rivers and muskegs."

"This river ought to be called Pokerface, instead of Peace," asserted Slim. "Where did it get the name anyway?"

"Dey tell nice story 'bout dat on de Company post," said the Trapper as he tended the tarpaulin sail stretched on an oar and tied to the mast. "In ole days seem' lak dese Indians on da reever was mos' bes' fightin' men ever was see. Dey fight up-reever, dey fight down-reever. Was woods-Indians, dese Indians on da reever an' was try kip de contree from Indians w'at was follow de buffalo in 'ere from da prairie."

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"Buffalo!" exclaimed the two Wyoming men.

"Yass. Buffalo 'ere yet over on Caribou Mountain' west from da reever, between 'ere an' Great Slave Lake. Not many. Plenty been killed by bad winter, ole Company men say, mebbe sixty year' ago. But dis fightin' I tole you about, he's long before dat. Dese reever Indians, Beavers, w'en dey not been huntin' Crees from da prairie, was chasin' Chipewyan come up on de canoe' from de lak'. Was one bad fight on Battle Reeve between Beavers and Crees. We pass on dat place in leetle w'ile. Reeve comes in from west. Bad fight dere. Bad fight everyw'ere on da reever. Sapree! Mus' been plenty bad for bimebye 'ead man of all t'ree tribe' come togedder on place on lower reever. I show you dat point w'en we get dere. Den chief of Cree an' chief of Beaver an' chief of Chipewyan all is paddle out on reever an' is smoke pipe of peace. Dey mak' beeg treaty for no more fightin'. So dis is La Rivière de la Paix, Peace Reeve; dat's firs' name w'ite man 'ear."

"Did they keep their treaty?" asked Kansas.

"You couldnen never see more peacefuller people dan Beavers. Me, I find it 'ard to belief dey ever is been fightin'. Chipewyan, same way. But 'ere's funny t'ing. Crees dey fight everybody w'en trappers firs' come on da contree, fight everybody, 'cept only Beavers and Chipewyan. So mebbe dere's somet'ing in dat story dey tell. Anyhow you don' fin' any tribe but Beavers on dis reever."

A sullen echoing roll of thunder brought their attention back to the river. The water was running in green-gray waves streaked with white, and the trees on the eastern bank were sighing ominously, tossing their branches against the darkening sky.

"Looks like a bad storm a-comin'," said Kansas when the Trapper began swiftly to take down their clumsy sail. They took their places at the oars, but in the deluge of rain that presently descended it was impossible to see where they were going. The wind howled down the river gorge and choppy waves rose and curled perilously close to their gunwale. The Trapper edged in as close as he dared to the west shore which showed a dim blur through the rain. The east shore, a quarter mile away, was hidden entirely. The wind and the current tossed them downstream, oars only serving to keep the

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heavily laden craft steady. Suddenly the river swerved to the left and the current set strongly out to the middle of the stream.

"Pull!" yelled the Trapper. "Kip 'er close on de shore if you don' wan' go drown!"

The cowpunchers dug into the water.

"Mak' de short strokes!" shrieked their guide. "Mak' 'em queek, or de win' goin' get us between dem!"

The wind, now broadside, swept the stern around, or was it the Trapper with his steering oar? Frantically they fought the off-shore surge of the current, foot by foot they gained on it, nearer and blacker loomed the land, as Kansas could see in wild glances thrown over his shoulder. Was the Trapper crazy, he wondered. He was putting them head on at this cliff.

"Pull! Sacré cœur de Marie! can't you pull!"

Slim thought his heart would burst in his side, and yet the Trapper filled their ears with strange, profane entreaty. They tore at the water, forging inches ahead, drifting yards downstream. Suddenly the black wall which was almost at their bow drew aside like a curtain, a few more strokes and they felt the lee of the point they had passed, the boat was shooting forward.

"Tam to res', boys," shouted the Trapper above the roar of wind and rain. "I bring 'er in."

The two waited, panting, oars in air. The dark shadow of the shore was in sight again, now it was looming over them. The boat's keel grated on gravel, and the three sat a moment motionless, paralyzed with relief. A sudden jerk forward lifted the boat further up the beach. An Indian had climbed down the bank and was dragging their craft to a safe position. His rain-sluiced face grinned like a cheerful gargoyle.

"Long time watch, no think you make um," he vouchsafed.

His own canoe was inverted on the bank, they could see, and a woman was hurriedly making camp. The three white men followed her example. When the tent had been set up and a good fire was blazing at its door the Trapper spoke for the first time since they had landed.

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"Pretty soon you fellers mak' good river-men," he said. He knew no higher praise.

Two days later they came to the first of the lower settlements and beyond Point Wolverine with its store, its six or seven cabins and its graveyard, they began to overtake descending parties of Klondikers. As Jack Graham had predicted, they were catching up with those who had set out long before. Sometimes the Wyoming men crept up and slid by these travelers without a contest. Sometimes the process developed into a race, when the Trapper with his superior knowledge of the river took advantage of every hidden current that would help the boat he was guiding, often crowding their contestant into slack water or a backward moving eddy. Some of the boats they passed were strange, unwieldy craft with clumsy lines like a child's drawing, others were well-built and even painted, with names lettered on stern and bow. One of these names on a boat drawn up on shore caught Slim's eye.

"Hi! Kansas, see that name?"

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"W'at you see?" asked the Trapper, straining his head over his shoulder.

"Willis Party," said Slim. "We heard last winter they was stuck on the New Trail from the Athabaska to Fort St. John. Horses starvin', it was said."

"The talk was that they would have to give up and go out afoot," added Kansas. "But they must have made it after all."

"Mebbe some one go after dem wit' dogs," surmised the Trapper.

"Anyhow I'm sure glad they got through," said Slim.

The banks of the great river valley had been growing steadily lower, and the sandstone cliffs disappeared; the valley itself was becoming wider until the first terrace above the river merged imperceptibly with the vast prairie land. At a point where the river divided into channels they kept to the west and so passed the Lawrence ranch with its wide cleared fields, some of them over a hundred acres in extent, and its well-kept fences. Beyond the fields the men saw the houses and outbuildings of the farm. Nine miles further on they passed a flourmill and then where the river channels

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once more united, they began to see wide fields carpeted with the vivid green of springing wheat on the eastern bank. Scattered houses often painted white grew more frequent, drew together and lined up along a road which led to the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Fort Vermilion on Fair Point jutting out into the river.

The site was a beautiful one with the river sweeping about two sides of it, stretching in a silver reach to the northeast, a wooded island on its breast, and the Caribou Mountains visible across the plain beyond, forty miles away. The Company buildings were many, for the place was the center not only for the settlements but also for a large Indian trade. A close-cropped lawn covered the enclosure and flowers and shrubbery were massed about the dwelling houses. On the shelves of the Company store the men saw things that told volumes of the life of the community, books and even music, and they heard the clerks talking of a dance at the factor's house. The Catholic Mission had extensive grounds and good buildings and the Church of England had a neat enclosure with a white-painted church. Both the Missions had gardens and farms, and everywhere was the evidence of prosperous comfort.

Below the post for a stretch of four or five miles they went through a fine belt of forest, tall balsam cottonwoods four feet in diameter and spruce almost as large, and then they came out on muskeg country, with poplars growing on low ridges between the great bottom lands.

"This sure ain't no country for horses," observed Kansas when they camped at noon. He had tested the depth of the nearest swamp with a stick which had sunk easily as far as he had shoved it.

"Non, winters in 'ere isn't bad," explained the Trapper. "Pretty good for Nor' Contree, and all dis muskeg get de good chance in summer for thaw. A horse goin' be sinkin' down in heem, sure."

Sixty miles below the fort they began to hear the hoarse voice of the rapids and the Trapper guided the boat in to the head of the portage path.

"We can shoot dese," he said, "but honly wit' empty boat. We mak' de camp now, for portage de stuff."

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A number of parties were in process of getting down the rapids. Boats were beached in the cove, tents were scattered among the poplars, piles of supplies covered over with tarpaulin stood near the trail, and Indian packers were jogging along the path with huge packs on their backs supported by tump-lines and a strap over the forehead.

"De bes' of dem carry t'ree hundred pound' at de tam," said the Trapper. "An' me, I goin' look for one of dose good fellers."

Slim and Kansas made their camp, and began transferring the stuff from their boat to a pile beside their tent. They were thus engaged when a York boat was beached near their skiff, and they heard a friendly call. Looking around they saw Bennett, an acquaintance of the days of waiting at Edmonton. Burdens were laid down, Bennett introduced his partner, Flugard, and they all talked at once, exchanging their experiences in crossing to the river, and asking and answering questions about the horses.

"Just got here?" asked Bennett, after these matters had been properly discussed.

"Not more than an hour ago."

"Got your packers yet?"

"Our pardner, the Trapper, is huntin' one," said Kansas.

"We'll put in with you, if you like," suggested Bennett. "Help you get your stuff and boat through if you will see us over afterwards."

"That's all right with me," said Kansas.

"You bet," added Slim.

And they all bent their backs to unloading the boats. By the time the Trapper returned with an Indian the two piles were all stacked up beside the tent, and with six men packing over a trail of only three hundred and fifty yards it was not a lengthy process to bring all the freight for the Wyoming party down to the lower end. When this was done, however, the Trapper scanned the evening sky over which a faint hue of rose was gathering.

"No tam now for get all dis udder stuff over before is dark," he declared. "De mos' bes' t'ing we can do is tak' de boat over. Den

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all our stuff, it's togedder, an' we can watch it 'ere, w'ile dose udders, dey is camping wit' deirs on de firs' end of portage."

The others agreed, and Bennett with his partner and the Indian carried their camping outfit ashore while the Trapper and the Wyoming men shoved their boat out into the stream. The rapids extended from bank to bank across the river in a tossing foaming mass four hundred yards long.

"Now, boys," said the Trapper, "w'en we begin to feel da rapide you 'old de oars up out de water, ready. W'en I say 'right' or 'lef' or 'back' you do jus' w'at I say. But don' you do not'ing by yourself. Steady now, we're on de start."

With a whirl of his stern oar the guide pointed the boat down stream, and turning, twisting, backing under his shouted cries, the two at the oars saw black rocks and white water fly by. Once some obstacle clawed their sides with a sinister scrape, once they heeled over in so sharp a turn that it seemed they must upset. Then suddenly the water beneath their oars turned black and deep and they were floating in the back eddy at the foot of the portage path.

"God!" exclaimed Kansas. "I don't think I took a breath after we got goin'. My lungs feels plumb collapsed."

The river swept past them, rough and swift as far as they could see.

"Dat's pretty fas' water for mile an' half," said the Trapper, "but safe 'nough till you come on de falls. We mak' portage wit' de boats dere."

The following day they spent in getting Bennett over the rapids and in reloading the boats to be ready for an early start in the morning. It was agreed that the Wyoming men should go first and that Bennett and Flugard should follow about noon. Daybreak came at four o'clock and by daybreak the cowpunchers were ready to set off. The mile and a half to the head of the falls seemed tame and harmless after the rapids, but the deepening roar ahead and the quickening current warned of reason for caution.

The falls were set diagonally across the river with the deepest water passing over an indentation in the shelf nearer the right bank. The portage path was on the south shore along a dyke of

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rock that paralleled the river, and the Trapper edged the boat out of the current to the landing-place. The carry was a short one, but the path ended in a huge pile of drift from the cataract over and through which the men had to climb.

"Dat's plenty bad t'ing to get de boat over," remarked the Trapper, as they struggled down with their last loads.

"Wouldn't be a bad idea to slide it over with a rope, would it?" asked Kansas. "I have my lariat fastened around the tent."

"You get heem, den. We fin' use for heem."

The emptied boat was drawn up on shore and set on rollers along the dyke. The Trapper then fastened the lariat to the stem of the boat, passed it back and around the stern thwart and then forward to a half-hitch over the stem.

"Now, me, I pull 'er," he said, "and you fellers shove on de stern an' kip de roller under 'er."

"Stick 'em back in front when they roll out behind?" asked Slim.

"Dat's de t'ing. An' kip dem straight."

With grunts and tugs they got it started, and by stretches of pulling and shoving, alternating with panting pauses, they moved it along the dyke. At the top of the drift-pile they changed places. The Trapper loosened the rope from its last fastening to the stem, and passing it back to the cowpunchers to hold, he set his shoulders against the bow. Then foot by foot they edged it down the pile to the shore of the pool below the falls. The whole process was completed, the load had been stowed and snugged down with its tarpaulin by noon. Only the lariat was still out. Kansas carried it coiled in his hand for use on Bennett's boat, as they trudged up the portage to meet their friends.

They perched on a rock by the side of the path and watched other Klondikers struggling with their outfits, until presently the York boat appeared up the river, with Bennett standing in the stern and Flugard at the oars.

"He's pretty far off de shore," observed the Trapper anxiously. "Dat's rough water w'at he's in."

Bennett apparently had the same idea, and was trying to head

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closer in to the shore, but the current setting over to the vortex of the falls made his progress dangerously slow.

"My God!" gasped Slim. "They ain't a-goin' to make it!"

The three scrambled down from their rock and waded out into the river as far as they could hold firm footing. The two men in the York boat were both now frantically rowing, but the river had them in its grip and they swept past, a few feet beyond the snatching hands of their friends. A pile of drift with several large trees standing out at crazy angles from it formed a sort of island close inshore on the very brink of the falls, the water sliding over the crest in a curve of polished silver on its either hand. Bennett and Flugard with a superhuman effort flung the bow of the boat upon the point of this island and by a miracle of heaven it held. The stern spun about and with a crash the boat was thrown on the tangled edge of the drift. A hoarse shout arose from the portage path where the Klondikers had been watching with frozen horror, and Kansas and Slim let out a series of cowpuncher yells. Bennett and Flugard waved their hats in response.

"Well, dey are not gone dead lak' dey ought to be," said the Trapper. "But sacré tonnerre, 'ow dey get off?"

"Get off!" echoed Kansas. "We'll get 'em off, if that stuff they're on will only hold up long enough."

The three splashed to shore, where the crowding Klondikers made way for them. Kansas spoke to a party who were about to place their boat on the path.

"Could you wait with that for a little while, boys? We just got to get our boat up here to fetch our friends off that drift-pile."

"Off the drift-pile! You can't do that! You'll only go over the falls, yourselves," expostulated the leader of those to whom he had spoken.

"No, we won't. Not the way we're aimin' to do it. But we sure need this path for a little while."

"You can have the path and welcome, but if you'll pardon my saying it, you're fools to try—"

But Kansas, Slim and the Trapper did not wait to hear the opinion of their folly. They were running down the path, while

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the Klondikers followed to watch what they might do next. When it was seen they were unloading their boat, a dozen men leaped to their assistance, and with the many hands it soon was emptied and lifted clear to be carried up the trail. From the drift-pile Bennett and Flugard followed every move. Kansas selected a place opposite them where a full-sized poplar grew close to the shore. Then he stepped out on a flat rock with his lariat in his hand and set the loop flying across the narrow channel to the men on the mass. Flugard caught it. Kansas cupped his hands about his mouth.

"Tie it to a tree," he yelled, but the roar of the water drowned his voice.

Flugard stood bewildered with the end of the rope in his hand, until Slim stepped to a near-by tree and made the pantomime of passing a loop around it. Then Flugard waved his hat and the two men fastened the rope to a spruce, the largest of the trees in their mass. When those on shore had taken up the slack and secured the end to the poplar, the lariat was stretched taut about five feet above the water. The boat was set down beneath the rope. Slowly the men eased its bow into the water. Kansas climbed in and seized the rope over his head, while the boat was shoved out until Slim could follow. As it was pushed clear of the shore Slim moved forward until he too was in the bow with his hands on the rope. The stern whipped around until it seemed to hang over the falls but the two men held it pointing up the channel, and edged it over to the drift. They could be seen conferring with Bennett and Flugard and then the two on the reef began to unload the York boat into the skiff. Kansas and Slim brought over the freight in three loads, then they took off Flugard, and drew their boat up on shore. They waved their hats at Bennett who unfastened the lariat from the spruce tree and transferred it to the York boat, tying it fast to the stem with a long end that he secured to the after thwart. The whole crowd on the shore seized the rope as Bennett thrust the boat out from the drift, and hauled it and its passenger safe to the landing-place.

"Boys," said the Trapper, when they all stood together again,

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"w'at you say to dis? I been makin' fire, an' mebbe if you don' min' trapper's food—"

They responded with yells of joy.

The Wyoming men stayed with Bennett to put his boat and freight over the portage, but on the open river the skiff quickly outdistanced the York boat and left it far behind. They camped for one night at the mouth of the Red River and marveled to see how far the vivid stain of the vermilion waters was carried down the larger stream. For hours the next day they could trace it. They passed a raft loaded with horses and learned they were being taken to work on the portage at Fort Smith, and if it were feasible they would be taken on to Dawson.

"Dat's w'at is never goin' to work," asserted the Trapper confidently. "Dis no kind contree for horses. Mebbe dey raft dem to de mout' of Mackenzie. Dat's pretty damn long way from Dawson."

As the river narrowed down between walls of limestone they shot the snarling Lower Rapids and camped one noon on Peace Point where the three warring tribes had made their treaty in the days before the white man came. Here Kansas found the first wild rose and noted it in his diary. They navigated around islands in a canyon's shadow where the river turned almost south, and they shot partridge as a change from bacon and fish, and gathered pitch to be ready for the trouble they must expect on the rough water of Slave River ahead of them. On May twenty-seventh they reached the forks of the river, and leaving the branch that ran into Lake Athabaska on the right, they bore east to Slave River. They had put over five hundred miles behind them in twelve days.

From the connecting stream they rowed out into the Slave, a wide river with a swift current, sliding northward between a high rocky shore to the east and a low grassy bank on the west. At noon they reached the first rapid and headed in shore above it to fortify themselves with food for the descent. Two other parties were camped on the shore, and as they beached their boat several men gathered to greet them.

"Slim! Kansas! You old frauds! Where are the others?"

The cowpunchers stared.

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"Putnam! The Bronco Buster!" they shouted with delight and tumbled out of the boat to pound him and his friends on the back.

Further up the bank the Californians were camped, and the three parties ate dinner together, talking fast to bring the story of their adventures up-to-date from the time when they had parted in the Athabaska woods. For the rest of that day they traveled together, shooting the first rapid, one behind the other, with success, and camping at the head of the second; all save one boatload whose craft escaped control, and went down over the rapids broadside. The men were never able to get her turned about, but they managed to maneuver in the unconventional position without mishap. But getting through the constantly recurring stretches of rough water was slower business for the large parties made up of several boats than it was for the Wyoming men in their skiff; and as neither Putnam's party nor the Californians needed extra help, they struck out at their natural gait, and so reached Smith Landing on the second morning.

"Dis de place w'ere we get a guide," said the Trapper. "Dere's sixteen mile' of dose rapide between 'ere an' Fort Smith, an' de channel it's change' every season on places."

Smith Landing was a busy place. A cart trail had been cut through the woods to the post, and some of the many Klondike parties were arranging to have their whole outfit freighted over this trail. A sizeable encampment of Chipewyan Indians and half-breeds with their families was spread along the river bank and the men could be hired as packers, or as steersmen and guides for those who elected to go down the rapids in their boats. Even with the numbers available, every qualified Indian was kept busy, and dated up for days ahead. The Trapper went up to the Hudson's Bay Company's store where lists of the guides were kept, but he returned with the news that they could not hope to get away for two days, in spite of the fact that parties were uniting in groups of ten and twelve boats. For two days then they waited, and what with their impatience and the savage attacks of swarms of mosquitoes, life was a misery. Kansas and Slim had the cheesecloth headnets which they had bought at Edmonton, but the heat made the wearing of

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them almost intolerable during the day, and at night there seemed to be no way of rigging the nets to be a protection. Sleep was well-nigh impossible, and by the time the guide arrived and the party could move the men were all but exhausted.

They left Smith Landing at two in the afternoon with twelve other boats and came down the first rapid which was two miles long with no more serious trouble than the mild scraping of a submerged log. The second day was spent in making a portage of four hundred yards around a thirty foot falls, and here Slim and Kansas had their first altercation with a Klondike party. They had found that three boats of their group were shorthanded in making this transfer, and taking out their lariat they had offered assistance which was eagerly accepted. Together with the men of these boats they packed twelve tons of provisions over the trail and then took the strangers' three boats across with rope and rollers, yet when the Wyoming men with the Trapper started up the portage path for their own boat they saw that the others were not following to assist them with their load. They waited a moment to be certain that the others were actually beginning to put their freight in their boats. Then the cowpunchers looked at each other.

"Well, if they ain't sons of polecats!" Slim spat in disgust.

But Kansas approached the leader of the party.

"You ain't aimin' to leave before you help bring our boat across?" he drawled gently.

The other glanced at his five partners, and confident in the superiority of numbers, laughed.

"We helped haul your freight over, and I guess that'll have to do. We're in a hurry."

With a movement like a cat the Trapper took possession of the pile of oars and steering-sweeps that lay together where he himself had dropped them. He stood over them with one heavy oar poised like a quarter-staff, and when the Klondiker made a move in his direction he set it whirling belligerently.

"It's too bad you're in a hurry," still Kansas' voice was gentle, "because you see you ain't leavin'."

With a snarl the Klondiker turned.

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"Do you think you can take him on, Kansas?" asked Slim. "If not, I'll do it."

For answer Kansas met the leader's rush with a lightning swift left. The man staggered back a step, caught his foot on a root and fell prone. Kansas stood over him with a grin.

"This fight is over, ain't it?" he asked.

"You win," said the prostrate one.

"Boys," said Kansas to the other five, "it won't take no time at all for the nine of us to get that skiff of ours over; and we'll all feel a heap better about the whole deal all around, you as well as us, if you just unload them two sides of bacon and the bag of flour you took by mistake from the wrong pile."

Shamefacedly the others returned the appropriated supplies, and then fell in behind the cowpunchers on the portage path. Nothing more was said, and in apparent amity the skiff was brought across, loaded and launched, and the four boats proceeded together to the camping-place for the party.

For four more days they crept down the river by alternate chutes and carries. The air was hot and still, and the mosquitoes tormented them on the portages and tortured them at night.

"God!" cried Slim. "What wouldn't you give for a breeze? This work is sure hell!"

"You t'ink you seen somet'ing?" inquired the Trapper. "Wait till you been crossin' de Mountain Portage."

And after the three had spent two days dragging the boat and their freight over its six hundred yards, up a steep hill and down again, and all through sand in which they sank halfway to their knees, they were ready to admit they had met something new in portage work. It was at Mountain Portage that they first heard of the man on the rock. Savanaugh, the Indian guide of the party ahead of theirs, had come to grief.

"Dat Indian mus' had tenderfoot doing stern paddle for heem," said the Trapper.

Whatever the explanation his boat had run on a rock in mid-stream. The Indian had leaped to the rock and succeeded in freeing the boat which was in grave danger of sinking by the stern,

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thereby saving the lives and supplies of the men in the boat, but leaving himself marooned.

"Can't nobody get at him?" asked the cowpunchers, aghast, of the man who brought the news back from the post.

"He isn't even in the regular channel," replied their informant. "You will see for yourselves when you get there. He knew no one could get him when he stepped off, and he sits there now, never making a sign as the boats go by."

"But didn't them fellers in his party even try to take him off?" exclaimed Kansas. "Didn't they even come back to see what they could do?"

"There isn't anything to do. They'd just all be drowned. That's bad water."

After the man had gone on the three labored in silence for awhile, then Kansas spoke.

"Trapper, when we get down where that Injun is, if he's still on that rock, let's you and us see if we can't rope him off there."

The Trapper grinned.

"Dat's fine t'ing for try," he said.

In accordance with their plan, when the following morning they came in sight of the huddled dark figure on the rock to the left of the waste of white waters, the Trapper steered the skiff out of the main channel that the other boats were following into the confusion of this western passage. Kansas shipped his oars and turned about on his seat, taking his lariat in his hand. He would get to his feet when they were nearer the rock, meanwhile he watched the current and the speed of the boat. The Indian saw them coming and standing up waved them over to the main channel.

"Poor devil!" thought Kansas. "He can't figure even yet we're comin' after him."

The boat was gathering headway now and the rock seemed to be rushing up the stream at them. Kansas rose, his lariat in his hand. The Trapper aimed directly for the rock, counting on the dividing current behind it to carry them to the side. The cowpuncher flung his loop, but he threw as he would throw from a running

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horse, not allowing for the sidewise jerk that his motion gave to the boat. The rope missed the rock by inches, and the boat thrown out of its course shot by the rock to the left rather than on the right where it might be maneuvered back to the channel again. Kansas crouched in the bows. He dared not turn to get at his oars lest he overturn them all. They snaked and twisted through the white welter, missing the black teeth of a reef on one side, only to graze the saw edge of a rock on the other. A deeper note was sounding through the roar, drawing nearer. Was there a falls ahead? Then he saw it, the smooth silver crest, dark and threatening, in front—beneath him. The bow shot out into the air and then descended with a shivering crash onto the surface of the water ten feet below. The eighteen foot skiff, loaded though it was, had spanned the jump and the keel had not broken. The whirl of the water carried them around and back, facing upstream in the shelter of the right bank. Above them was the end of the portage path, and a crowd of Indians and Klondikers who had been watching their mad descent.

A man in the scarlet tunic of the Mounted Police came forward through the crowd.

"Bo'jour, M'sieur!" grinned the Trapper. "You still 'ere?"

"Well, well, Doc!" returned the constable. "I never thought I'd live to see you come over the falls. How did you ever get out of the channel? That was a lucky escape, man!"

"Don't we know it!" said Slim.

"We was tryin' to get at that Injun," explained Kansas. "Do you know, if we could do it again, I believe I could get him."

"Me, I've had enough," declared Slim. "I ain't cravin' no repetition. We might not be so lucky next time."

The constable was regarding them all with grave attention. He took in the lariat lying in wet loops at Kansas' feet.

"Your idea was to get near enough to rope him?" he asked.

"Not him, sir, but the rock. Then I thought we could pull the boat back up to him," said Kansas.

"It might be done," said the constable, "but not with a loaded

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boat. If you really want to try it again, I have a light boat here, and I'll go with you."

"Now you're talkin'," said Kansas.

"If course, if you're goin', I'm with you, Kansas," put in Slim.

But the constable interfered. He could take only three to have room for the Indian, and he needed a man who was bred to "white water." He would not attempt it without the Trapper. So Slim stayed with the skiff and made camp while the other two followed the constable to where his little boat was tied.

"More better to cross over?" asked the Trapper.

"Slacker current over there above the falls," agreed the policeman.

They paddled across the river, carried the boat past the falls, worked their way well above the Indian's rock and once more faced downstream. Again Kansas saw the Indian on his island seeming to rush toward him. Now! The lasso sailed out and settled around a point of the reef, and the experienced paddlers eased the whirl with which the frail craft spun around into the lee. Kansas had fastened his end of the lariat to the handhold at the bow of the boat, but before he could reach out to pull up on the rope, he saw they were moving forward. Savanaugh was drawing them in.

When the boat was resting on the lower end of the rock the cow-puncher leaped quickly ashore, slackened his lariat and carefully coiled it up. Then he returned to the boat and the Indian, with a backward kick that threw them into the right-hand channel, lightly followed.

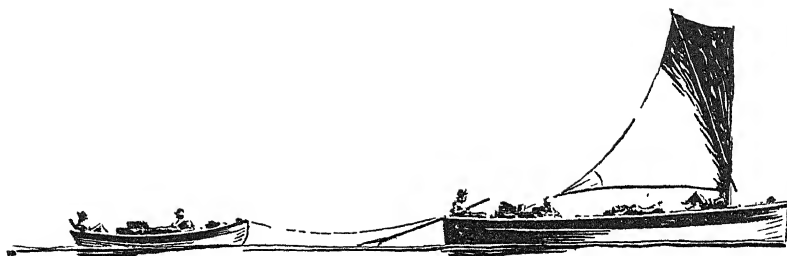
The four walked back along the portage path to the post.

"Isn't your camp at the Landing, Savanaugh?" asked the constable.

The Indian nodded.

"My party down river," he explained. "I go down river. They hire me for guide."

"You're goin' down after them skunks that left you to die on that—" Kansas was nearly speechless. "Well, I'll be damned!" was his final conclusion.



Chapter IX

THE TWO NAVIGATE THE MACKENZIE

SLIM had unloaded the skiff and had the supplies in a neat pile under a tarpaulin beside their tent, when his partners reached the camp.

"What's the idea?" asked Kansas. "Are you so fond of portages that you're aimin' to roll the boat up to the top of the falls and back just to be doin' somethin'?"

Slim shook his head.

"That boat was sure buckled some, goin' over them falls. She's leakin' bad."

"The devil, you say!"

The three went down to the shore where Slim had the boat beached and carefully examined the hull. The keel was cracked, several of the center ribs were sprung and the seams had plainly opened.

"Well, boys," said the Trapper, "we was going have to do leetle building on her down de reever to put her in shape for da lak'. We jus' tak' leetle more tam an' feex her up now. On de mornin' we're passin' on de Post for see if we can' pick up some lumber."

"I'm all for that idea," exclaimed Slim. "I've been sittin' here all the while you fellers was gone, picturin' us in a sawpit with these damn mosquitoes added to our other joys."

"Sapree! dey're plenty bad!" agreed the Trapper, beating about his head incessantly with a leafy switch he carried.

"Carve out a good hunk each time they hit you," declared Kansas, "and then go off and sit on a limb to eat it."

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But a wind that sprang up at sundown saved them from another sleepless night, and they were ready for work when they set out to visit the post the next day. Fort Smith was old, and the few buildings were dilapidated.

"Look as though they might be needin' any lumber they might have their own selves," said Slim.

But Mr. McKinley the factor in charge lent a ready ear to their requests. Months of dealing with the wants of clamoring Klondikers had not hardened his heart, or perhaps he had heard of the rescue of Savanaugh.

"We've been rebuilding the Company steamer, the *Wrigley*, this winter," he said, "and the job is just about done. I'll give you an order and you can go up there and help yourselves to any of the scraps you can use. You ought to find almost anything you could want. Not at all! Glad to oblige." Mr. McKinley had scribbled the order as he talked and now turned to the next in line.

"That's a white man!" was the cowpunchers' verdict as they came away.

They passed through the Indian camp which was even larger than the settlement at the Landing, and skirted the many tents of the Klondikers, to where the Company steamer loomed high among the trees, looking impressively big as she stood on the ways. Around and beneath they found slabs and planks in plenty for their work, and a stout section of two by four that could be shaped into a keelson to reënforce their weakened frame.

"I calls this luck," declared Slim, as they carried the first load around to their camp.

The same luck continued to favor them, for the cold wind rose rather than moderated and swept the mosquitoes into hiding, and even though it brought snow the three whistled at their work, beating their blue hands against their sides to warm them without a murmur of complaint. And so Bennett and Flugard found them four days later. The supporting keelson had been put in the full length of the bottom of the boat, the ribs had been drawn up true, the sprung planking had been replaced and the three were boiling out pitch to caulk the seams.

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"She's more stronger dan ever," declared the Trapper, explaining their mishap and its consequences.

"You're just about finished with her, aren't you?" asked Bennett.

"Non, we goin' mak' w'at you call deck over bow. Den she's goin' be more better for cross de lak'. It geeve us good cabane w'en de rain, he's coming."

Bennett agreed that it would be a good arrangement and then he broached the subject that had occasioned his visit.

"We've been anxious to overtake you fellows because we want to make a proposition to you. Not to you, Doc. We know you're tied up to the Company. But to these Americans. You probably don't know it, but we're not bound for the Klondike."

"Not goin' to the Klondike!"

"I never did think much of gold rushes. Men are apt to spend a great deal more than they can make. There are surer ways of making money in the North, and we want to let you in with us. We wouldn't be here to make the offer if it weren't for you fellows."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Kansas.

"Forget it!" said Slim.

"Did you fellows ever hear of the Hershel Islands?"

"No, what's them?"

"They lie off the mouth of the Mackenzie in the Arctic Ocean and they're a supply station for the whaling fleet. Any supplies you take down there you can sell for high prices. And there are plenty of Esquimaux along the coast who will come out to the islands too if a trader is there. They have furs that *are* furs."

"Dat's right," corroborated the Trapper. "Dose 'ard winter mak' mos' bes' skin'."

"So you see," said Bennett. "You make a fine profit on the stuff you take down and another finer one on the furs you bring back. You can't miss it. Not like this mining. Now you have it and tomorrow your vein has petered out, even if you're lucky enough to make a strike. Now we want you to go in with us on this boatload of goods. We bought it, but you saved it at Vermilion, so we figure you have an equal interest in it. Come down to the islands with us and make some sure money."

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"Bennett," said Kansas, "you're damn decent!"

"You sure are," put in Slim.

"But we're not exactly committed to minin' ourselves. We got some pardners goin' in overland from Fort St. John with a herd of horses to sell in Dawson. We're just hurryin' on ahead to get things ready for them, hay, feed and such. Of course we got to put in a winter waitin' and we wouldn't refuse to pick up what gold we find lyin' around. But horses is our main bet. Naturally we can't take up with your offer, but we sure appreciate it just the same."

"You bet!" said Slim.

"Well!" declared Flugard, "I won't say we're not disappointed."

"I'm glad you have another string to your bow besides mining anyway," said his partner. "But even if you won't take half the load, you have to take this much of it." And he opened a sack he had been carrying and brought out two pairs of strange looking boots like enormous moccasins with soft soles, and knee-length legs. "These are snowpacks," he explained. "The feet are lined with sheep's wool, double under the soles, and the tops tie around your leg just below the knee so no snow or wind can get inside. They're built especially for snowshoe work, but you will find nothing like them for the winter. We had hoped to seal our bargain with 'em, but of course you can't go back on your partners."

The following day the rebuilt steamer *Wrigley* went on her trial trip. Gleaming with fresh paint, she slid down her skids into the river and puffed gently to the Company wharf. All the Klondikers were invited on the ten mile trip down the river and back again, and most availed themselves of the chance to see the stretch of water they were soon to navigate. The stream averaged half a mile in width with countless wooded islands and an occasional sandbar or gravelly beach. The banks were low and sloped gently to the river with a thick second growth of evergreens and above this level sea of green Bell's Rock lifted a square mass of yellowish limestone seven miles below the fort. It loomed in the afternoon light like a stronghold of a giant race. At the point a few miles beyond this rock where the river curved northward the steamer turned back.

The cowpunchers and the Trapper had two more days' work

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putting the forward deck on their skiff and making it tight before they were ready for the river again, and meanwhile among the descending Klondikers came Putnam and the California Party. Putnam came down the portage path ahead of his partners to make some arrangements for the company. He was watching for his boats at any time, and spent hours with Kansas and Slim, who commanded a reach of the river from their camp. He told them of the plight of one boatload of the California crowd.

"They have a fine boat, and there's three of them in it. I guess it belongs to Springer, for he comes from Sacramento and the boat is named *California*. One partner is an ex-policeman from Chicago named Thomas, and Fritz, the third man, is a cigarmaker. What they don't know about boats would fill a book. They just can't handle it at all, and they're always in trouble and holding the others back. There's a lot of dissatisfaction about it."

"It's sure a mystery why some people ever started out on this trip," said Kansas.

"Well, Springer has had some sort of nervous breakdown, they say. He's going for his health. Honest!" Putnam added as they all shouted for joy.

"It must be fine for his nerves," said Kansas, "runnin' rapids in a boat he can't manage."

"Bet he won't have none left when he gets through," volunteered Slim. "They'll be plumb wore out."

"But it's a pity you fellows haven't got that boat," said Putnam. "It's a beauty."

They walked around to see it, and it was good, so good that Kansas made an offer to Springer. He and Slim would navigate the *California* with its owner as passenger, while the policeman and the cigarmaker supplied the motive power at the oars for the Trapper in their skiff. By shifting part of the skiff's load to the larger craft they could all make better time. The Californian agreed to the arrangement with alacrity. A half day was spent in expert caulking of all the *California's* seams and in dividing all the freight into proportionate loads for the two boats, during which process the Indian dogs managed to steal several sides of bacon, and to draw

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forth from the Wyoming men a colorful assortment of plain and fancy profanity.

Late in the afternoon of June eighteenth they left Fort Smith. The sun did not set until ten-thirty and it was broad daylight again by half past one in the morning with a stretch of northern twilight between. Where there were no rapids to contend with they planned to row day and night, serving in shifts, and by this scheme they reached Great Slave Lake in five days. Once they went ashore to make a mast for the *California* and to rig up a tarpaulin sail, twice they were driven in by the treacherous combination of downstream current and headwinds which kicked up sloppy little waves that persisted in breaking into their boats, and on one of these occasions they were held up by the continuance of the storm for more than twenty-four hours. Then a thick fog delayed them several hours and in the end caused them to run on a sandbank where they all had to jump out to lighten the boats and work them loose against the current, at times sinking in the soft bottom to their knees.

Great Slave Lake was a wonderful sheet of water, stretching three hundred miles northeast and southwest, and over fifty miles wide at the point where they had come out on it. The shores were low, but what they lacked in height they made up in irregularity, points reaching out, bays jutting back, one of them on the north shore over a hundred miles deep. The edge of the lake was now a gravel beach, now a rocky ledge, and everywhere the grass grew lush and green. Along the southern shore were occasional stretches of woodland which thickened to an actual forest of Banksian pine and white spruce near the outlet. But the greatest beauty was added by the islands, large and small, that fringed the shore or set a measure for the eye in the silver distances. For all its beauty the great lake was treacherous in mood. There were no mountains to break the force of whatever winds might blow, or to offer a lee shore in a storm. To cross a hundred twenty miles of its open waters in awkward, homemade craft, with landsmen at the oars, was a risky enterprise, and hundreds of Klondikers paid for their temerity with their lives.

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The *California* with her attendant skiff was six days in making the crossing, and her crew counted themselves lucky in not being longer delayed. They had trouble at the very outset in getting across a bay to Fort Resolution. They had started with their tarpaulin sails set to a favoring breeze, but when they were about halfway over, the wind died with a sudden diminishing sigh and then veered swiftly to the south, blowing fair in their faces. With what haste they could they lowered their clumsy canvas and got out the oars. The wind freshened as they rowed and there were moments toward the end of the pull when they wondered if they were going to be obliged to give up and drift back to their starting place. Luckily before their straining arms utterly gave out they won through the choppy waves on the shore, and at length, not without difficulty, were able to land near the Hudson's Bay Company's stockade. The rest of the afternoon was spent in loitering about the settlement. The Company post they thought was unusually neat and well-kept, with Mr. Gaudet's house and the warehouses inside the enclosure, and a camp of nearly a hundred Indians between it and the Mission. They passed the white picket fence shutting off the long rambling building of the convent school, portions of which were actually three stories high, with a fine gallery running along the second story and broad flight of steps leading to the ground. They visited the large and impressive church, where the interior fittings and the altar carvings had been made by the thin, dark-eyed lay brother who was their guide.

The next day they found a party that had been less fortunate than themselves. Some one waved at them from an island and putting in, they were greeted by two men who had taken shelter there from the storm. Their boat had been badly broken up in making the landing and everything they had, their food, camping equipment, even their store of matches, was soaking wet. They wanted to borrow dry matches, they said. Kansas and Slim and Springer tried to persuade the two to take passage on the *California* which was large enough to handle the additional load, but the strangers insisted that now they had matches they could manage very well. There were spruce trees on the island, they said, and with the gum

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they could caulk their boat which they were patching. They planned to strike across to the mainland and make their way along the shore. Reluctantly the cowpunchers and their friends had to leave them.

A half day was lost by a white wool fog which came rolling in from the lake and forced the *California* to drop anchor at an island, where the men fished and waited for the fog to lift. At sunset time, an hour before midnight, the white curtain turned rosy and began to stir, rising like a torn veil slowly drawn back to reveal the dark-blue line of the mainland against the matchless glory of the sky, the islands, and the shifting rose, blue and amethyst of the lake. In the early morning they set out in a glassy calm, and knowing they would have to row they took the skiff in tow and all the rowers together put the *California* through the water at a fair rate of speed. During the morning they overtook two hollow-eyed men who had been rowing since dawn and took them aboard with their boat strung along behind the skiff. With eight oarsmen they could laugh at the calm, but when the afternoon headwind sprang up the boats in tow became a leaden drag that lengthened out the hours. It was midnight before they reached the Mission at the mouth of Hay River.

They lingered at Hay River. The wind was contrary, or it died out entirely, and the party had had their fill of rowing. Also there were four ladies at the Mission of the English church and the cowpunchers, with shaven cheeks, hair plastered in place, clean shirts, and vivid handkerchiefs knotted about their throats, had found a charming audience for tall tales of the range and of their horses on the Edmonton Trail.

They made one false start to get only as far as Smith's mouth of the river where they had to camp again. But shortly after midnight on June twenty-ninth a favoring wind arose, and once more with their skiff in tow they were under way, and reached the big island at the mouth of the lake's converging outlet by mid-morning. Here they chose the right-hand channel and soon found themselves in such shallow water that they were obliged to take down the sail and row. Rough hills broke the skyline to the south and the Trap-

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per said they were the Big Horn Mountains. The Wyoming men looked them over and snorted.

"They ain't in a class with our Big Horns," said Slim. "We wouldn't say they was more than hills. They oughtn't to carry no such hifalutin' name."

The water of the lake was so charged with river sediment that it was impossible to see the bottom at the outlet, and Kansas went ahead in the skiff with a sounding-pole to pick out the course. This slowed them down, but before night they reached the point where the lake emptied into the river. Swarms of gnats on the wooded shore made the thought of camping unbearable, while the silvery twilight giving clear visibility tempted them on. They rowed in shifts along the varying stream, which was now narrow as a creek and again widened into the likeness of a lake, while the twilight first darkened and then brightened to the rosy hue of dawn. At six o'clock they reached Little Lake and Fort Providence on the high north bank, with the Catholic Mission and school beside it.

Finding the settlement already astir they landed and visited the Company store, where the Trapper fell into gossip with the factor, Mr. Scott, and the Klondikers strolled about to see the sights. After examining the merchandise, they went outside and watched the sisters marshaling the little Indian girls from their play to early school. They leaned on the fence of the Mission garden and looked with homesick eyes at neat rows of carrots and turnips, beets and radishes.

"Springer," said Kansas, "that looks to me like pieplant at the end of that row."

"And it looks to me as if it needed cutting," replied the Californian.

"It also looks to me like we was the ones to cut it proper," asserted Slim. "Let's see if we can't find one of them missionaries at the church and put the proposition up to him."

The black-robed guardian of the sacred building viewed their proposal with a favorable eye, a donation for the poor found its way into the good father's hands, and when the Klondikers left

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Fort Providence they bore with them an armful of the rosy stalks stripped of their great, green leaves.

"Mein Gott," ejaculated Fritz. "I could eat dem as dey vass, mitout cooking yet."

For fifteen days and nine hundred silver miles they followed the magnificent Mackenzie, past an unending spruce forest, by long, straight reaches and easy bends, swept on by the steady current, rowing or sailing by day, floating with one man at the tiller by night, two weeks of respite in a year of toil. There were sandbars in the narrows of Little Lake and once they were aground for a few hours, but when they reached the river proper, there was always water enough. The course was at first westward through the same plain that had bordered the lake, with the irregular line of the Horn Mountains on the north and the inconsiderable Big Horns on the south. These ridges, the Trapper explained, were not actually mountains, but rather the broken edges of the tilted plateau. The river usually was about a mile wide, but here and there it expanded to twice and even three times this size; and about seventy miles above Fort Simpson it narrowed down to less than a half mile expanse. The Trapper said this was the Line, so called because large boats could not be rowed against the quickened current there, but must be hauled up by a tow-line from shore.

Where the first great tributary, the Liard River, came in from the south, on an island in the stream was Fort Simpson, the Company headquarters for the entire North, and here they found many parties of Klondikers encamped. The news had spread abroad that the winter previous the two sons of the chief factor, Mr. Camsell, set out to guide a party up the Liard to the Yukon; and in spite of all that could be said by those who knew the river and stated that what might be practicable on the ice was impossible against the rapids of the open stream, a number of men were planning to try to reach Dawson by that way. Others were stopping to replenish exhausted stores, for the central station of the Hudson's Bay Company carried extensive equipment for wilderness life.

The post was a handsome one, with two-storied buildings of squared logs and with well-grown trees and the settled air of per-

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manence due to nearly a century of existence. A small Catholic Mission was near the post on the island, but the English Mission, which was also the headquarters for all the activity in the North, was on the main shore of the river a little below the mouth of the Liard. There was a pretty church, the bishop's house and a new Mission building put up to replace one destroyed by fire. Slim gazed at this last structure with awe.

"They tells me," he explained, "that they sawed all them boards by hand. That's a hell of a lot of lumber to get out in a sawpit!"

Early on the morning after they had passed Fort Simpson they came in sight of the Rocky Mountains, rising suddenly from the plain ahead without foothills to mask their height. Kansas was at the tiller while the others slept, and he feasted his eyes on the rugged shapes that the river seemed to be rushing to meet. There was a canyon in the hills, a deep valley that he could see, and he wondered if the Mackenzie entered the mountain chain. The Big Horn at home flowed through such a canyon. He wondered whether a shining sun would throw the same blue shadows he was used to see. It was hard to tell how it might look without the veil of falling rain.

But the river did not enter the mountains. When it reached their feet it turned with a majestic sweep to the north and the noisy Nahanni boiled out of the canyon to join it. On a point between the two streams some Indians were camped and the party stopped to barter with signs. Springer wanted a birch-bark canoe and a moose-skin robe to add warmth to his bed, and while he satisfied these needs the others traded for bear meat to vary their diet of bacon and fish.

On the fourth of July they came to Fort Wrigley where the Trapper was to report. They all walked up to the small Company post and the Klondikers wrote some letters to leave for the mail while Doc made his arrangements. Then he came out and insisted on taking them to the Indian village where they could get all the wild raspberries they could eat. They lingered looking at the buildings of the two Missions—anything to put off the hour of parting—but finally the Trapper went with them to where they had left

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their boats. They climbed aboard. He stood on shore holding the bow of the *California* and looking down the river, a fresh breeze blowing in his face.

"Min' dis wind, boys," he said. "It keeks up more worse water 'ere on Mackenzie dan w'at you never see on Slave Reeever. Kip close on de shore till you can see w'at it's getting ready for do, an' go on shore before it's getting too bad."

"Thanks, Trapper," said Kansas. "We will."

"Dere's honly one rapide w'at you fin' dis tam of year, twenty mile' below Fort Norman. She's on de east side da reever. So long you stay on dis side you goin' be all right."

"We'll remember how you taught us to shoot 'em," said Slim.

"I t'ink mebbe you won' never notice dem. You're reever-men now. Well! Wish you luck!"

"So long, Trapper."

He shoved them off and they dropped downstream. A depression lay on their spirits like a palpable weight, and they were glad when the rising wind gave them something to do. They hugged the shore, watching the angry, gray face of the river, dodging the tallest of the curling waves that threatened to swamp their boats. A slight Indian canoe drew up abreast of them, its solitary occupant grinning at them beneath his thatch of black hair. Side by side they struggled with the wind, then the canoe slipped ahead. They watched his paddle lift and swing as he approached the bend ahead of them. At the point he quickened the pace of his strokes but he seemed to hang motionless on the flying water.

"If he can't make it we can't," yelled Springer to Kansas.

"I expect we had better put in to shore," returned the other.

They beached their boats in a sheltered cove behind the point and presently the Indian joined them. While they were setting up their camp he busied himself putting out a net he carried in his canoe, a large net that he stretched out from the river's shore on pointed stakes driven into the river bottom and pounded solid with a stone. When this task was finished he took from his canoe an ancient muzzle-loading gun.

"Hi, boys!" said Kansas. "Here's a chance for fresh meat."

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Taking his own rifle he approached the man with signs indicating he would like to join the hunt. The Indian laughed aloud and said some unintelligible words, but as he extended his hand in greeting, Kansas understood him to give consent. When they had shaken hands they set off through the brush, the Indian in the lead. He moved along noiselessly, avoiding dead branches that might break under his foot, and Kansas followed treading in his tracks. For half an hour they threaded the woods thus silently until they reached a clearing where wild raspberries grew, and here they came on four feeding bears. Both men raised their guns and fired and one of the bears fell. Running out into the enclosure Kansas fired three times after the retreating ones. Two of them went down, but the fourth crashed through the opposite thicket and escaped. The Indian stood transfixed where they had first taken their places, his gun and his powder-horn in his hand. He had evidently been too astonished to finish the reloading he had begun. His eyes rested almost with fear on the cowpuncher's rifle. Kansas showed him the magazine with the empty space and the two cartridges still in place.

"Umhm!" said the Indian in amazement.

"Big medicine, ain't it!" affirmed the cowman, and they both laughed.

Leaving the carcasses of the bears where they had fallen they returned to the camp by the river, where the Indian stopped and pointed. From far up the stream and close inshore came a fleet of long canoes. With perfect rhythm the paddles dipped and rose again, and in spite of the wind and the rough water they came steadily on. The white men watched them with interest. There were twelve people and much freight in each of the frail walrus-hide boats, but men, women and boys plied the paddles, and they drifted into the cove like leaves afloat. As soon as the prows touched shore the people were out, and the women began unloading the boats and setting up shelters under the trees while the men brought in the net with fish for the entire camp.

The Indian hunter had run down to the shore when the first canoe had landed and had been talking earnestly to the oldest man in it. Now he returned with the people from this canoe and with

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signs made Kansas understand that they were returning to the clearing to cut up and bring in the bears. In a surprisingly short time they were back packing in the meat and laying it down by the Klondikers' boat. When all had been brought in Kansas selected what he thought his party could use, and laid it aside with his gun.

"This is mine," he said, and signed to the Indians to take the rest.

But the Indian hunter objected, pointing to the gunshot wounds and to the cowman's gun. Then he exhibited his own ammunition and compared it with the wounds, indicating that he had not killed any of the three animals. A murmur of approval from his companions showed he was following some recognized custom of his tribe.

Kansas, however, shook his head vigorously.

"We couldn't use all that meat," he protested.

The Indians, still motionless, exchanged puzzled glances. Then Kansas picked up his gun and the meat he had laid aside. He started toward his camp, pausing after a few steps to point from the balance of the meat to the scattered Indian encampment.

"The rest is yours," he said to them. "So take it and mosey along."

An excited sound swept the crowd as the meaning of the unintelligible words dawned on them. The women pressed forward to look at the kill, talking shrilly; the men surged around the white men and insisted on shaking hands.

"Hell of a lot of fuss over three bears," remarked Slim when the Indians had gone. "Particular when you consider that we'd a busted wide open sure, if we'd tried to eat 'em all."

"Poor devils!" said Kansas. "With them blunderbusses they got for guns I expect they don't get so many of them."

"Here they come back again," reported Springer. "And look what they have!"

The Indians were returning and two men carried five large silver fish strung by their gills on a slender branch that they carried between them. The old man made a speech and then the fish were laid down on the grass where they jerked and gasped convulsively. Slim accepted the donation, being by nomination the orator of the

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crowd, and the customary round of handshaking ended the ceremony.

"Well," said Kansas, "we may be in Canada, but Queen Victoria's subjects have sure seen to it that we have a feast to celebrate the Fourth. Stand aside, boys! Give me room and I'll throw you a regular feed."

But the excitement of the day was not over yet. The wind had been steadily rising until now it passed through the branches of the spruce trees with a low roar, and the waves of the river could be heard crashing against the far side of the point that sheltered the camp. A cry from the Indians called the attention of the Klondikers to a boat with two men in it, struggling in the welter of the stream. They were rowing desperately to reach the shore, but every now and then one of them must stop and bail. Anxiously white men and Indians watched the contest between men and river. If only they could keep from being swept beyond the point.

"They handle that boat as if they were used to rowing," remarked Springer.

"Py Gott! I dink dey make it!" shouted Fritz, and they all rushed down to be the first to drag the strangers up the beach.

The two oarsmen sat inert, their shoulders drooping with fatigue. The boat was awash with the water they had shipped, their camping equipment was sodden with the wet. The man in the stern was the first to move, and something in the spare form, the rugged features, and the tan that overlaid the gray weariness made Kansas think of the men of the range. He addressed him unconsciously with a greeting of the plains.

"Welcome, stranger. Won't you get down and rest your hands and face?"

"Thanks, old man," returned the other. "I wouldn't mind, though I can think of other parts of me that need resting more than my face."

"Why! You're not Americans!" exclaimed Slim in astonishment at the two lean individuals unfolded themselves and lifted their dripping legs over the boat's side.

"That we're not!" declared the second man.

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"We're Canadians from Ontario," went on the first speaker. "And Scots besides. So your guess was a wee bit wide of the mark."

"That's too bad," drawled Kansas. "For we was aimin' to git you to celebrate the Fourth with us. Bein' Canadian I don't know how you would feel about it. We've got bear meat a-roastin' and our Indian friends here have contributed some mighty fine-lookin' fish."

"If Independence Day grub won't stick in your throat," professed Slim, "I'll promise to refrain from sayin' anything unpleasant about your friend, King George Third."

The Canadians laughed.

"If you're offering us hot cooked food," they asserted, "you can be as independent as you please, and we shan't say a word. Just wait till we shake out this kit a bit."

"Bring your beds over to our fire," returned the cowpunchers. "They can be drying while you make your camp."

So the Canadians joined in the Fourth of July banquet, and the Americans not to be outdone in politeness started their independent festivities with a toast to the English Queen, a lady who, so Slim averred in proposing her name, "had lots more sense than her grandfather."

When the white men awoke the next morning they found that the Indians had gone, although the wind still whined through the tops of the trees and lines of foam were still streaking the river; but in spite of this example the Klondikers remained where they were for two days, the Americans spending their time in caulking the strained seams of their boat with pitch while the Canadians dried their outfit. The wind died down the evening of the second day so that the boats could put out from shore shortly after midnight, but the chill of the storm was still in the air and the men lashed the smaller boats one on either side of the *California* and all the men crowded in together under the shelter of her forward deck. They were huddled close for warmth and were half asleep when suddenly there came a thump followed by a sort of spasmodic flapping on the deck above their heads.

"My God! What's that?" cried Springer, startled out of a doze.

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They crawled aft and looked out in time to see the Indian hunter toss a second gleaming silver fish into their boat to lie beside the first that was flopping on the deck. Seeing their heads he raised his hand in greeting and then allowed his canoe to drop astern.

"Can you beat that?" asked Slim who was at the tiller. "He put out from shore ahead of us when he saw the boat comin'. He must have been watchin' for the chance to give us them fish. And he's been waitin' two days."

Campbell, the leader of the two Canadians, examined the fish closely.

"They must be 'connies,' " he said. " 'Inconnu,' 'Mackenzie River Salmon.' I've had them served me in hotels but I never saw one so near alive before. Handsome, aren't they?"

The river swept along in a valley that was almost a gorge with steep wooded banks springing two hundred feet, five hundred feet, into the air. It looked from the water as if the mountain ranges bordered on the river, but when Kansas followed moose sign back from their noon camping-place, he found that a steep climb brought him to a high plateau that stretched in a wide expanse for thirty or forty miles on either side of the river and beyond this plain the mountains reared their rugged limestone tops. Low ridges like wrinkles in this plain paralleled the river and a sparse growth of small evergreens and aspen masked the ground, but, high though it was, he walked knee-deep in a springy, yielding moss, and icy water crept up about his legs whenever he stopped to peer ahead for his game. He found his moose and killed it, sharing the meat with Indians he met. They were big fellows, these Loucheaux, fairer of skin and larger of frame than his friends the Dogribs of the river, and to his amazement they were armed only with bows and arrows.

Beyond this camping-place a river came in from the west, draining the hidden plateau and pouring a flood of clear black water halfway across the Mackenzie's turbid stream. Up its valley they could see the peaks. One morning Henry Thomas of Chicago's police force, who was at the tiller, woke them with a shout. The

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right bank of the river was a precipice over a hundred feet high, marked in horizontal streaks of white and gray, black and brown. In the darkest layer were holes from which smoke was issuing, and a smell like burning tar was in the air.

"They ain't hot springs," observed Slim, "for there ain't no water."

"And they don't smell like volcanic fireholes," said Springer in a puzzled tone.

"They must be the windows of hell," concluded Kansas, and the ex-policeman hurriedly crossed himself.

At Fort Norman, a few hours later, they learned that the smoke came from lignite coal which had been burning for over a hundred years. Ogilvie, the Queen's surveyor, had used some of it for a fire the year before when he had to camp in the rain, and had reported at the post that it worked very well and gave more heat than wood.

The men thought Fort Norman one of the most beautiful of the river posts, standing as it did where the Great Bear River poured its greenish-blue waters through a break in the steep bank of the Mackenzie, washing the foot of Bear Rock with the junction of the waters. The picturesque mountain sheltered the settlement with its bald dome from the worst of the north winds and made gardens possible. Flowers and trees softened harsh outlines. The Mackenzie widened here, its silver reach studded with islands, and on either hand the mountains marched along the sky.

"This is the sorta place Miss Anne would like, ain't it, Kansas?" queried Slim.

"I don't know Miss Anne," remarked Springer, "but I can commend her taste, whoever she is."

"It's even bigger as dot rock vere die Lorelei sings in Deutschland," admitted Fritz sentimentally.

Only Thomas failed to be impressed.

"Gimme the city, every time," said he.

There were several parties of Klondikers camped on the point with their faces set upstream. They had given up their quest, they said, for the Continental Divide was a barrier no living man could

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cross. They gave sinister warnings of rapids and inhuman labors. Nothing but death awaited the fools who pushed on, they assured any who would listen.

"They sounds just like them fellows that turned back in the Athabaska country," declared Slim in disgust. "And we know they was just plain yellow."

The factor at the post shook his head.

"It's a very bad trail from this side over the Divide. The Company uses it only in the winter with dogs. I shouldn't care to try it in summer. But that's not saying that it can't be done."

"You bet it ain't!" agreed Slim. "And we ain't come this far just to turn around."

Summer was upon them now, the short fierce summer of the Arctic. The men sweated as they toiled at the oars, for the wind was gone and the current was slow. The wide river between its high banks spread a mirror of steel that intensified and reflected the sun for twenty-two hours out of the twenty-four. There was no time for coolness even in the brief twilight. Ahead of them they saw the deserted buildings of an abandoned Hudson's Bay post. The Canadians who were leading dropped back beside the *California* and the skiff.

"That looks like a good place to lie by for Sunday," said Campbell. "There must be good water at a site they would choose for a post, and in the clearing the wind can blow away the flies, if any wind should come up."

"What's the idea of lyin' by?" asked Kansas. "Your boat leakin' or somethin'?"

"To-morrow's Sunday," said the Canadian.

"Sure, but what's that got to do with it?"

The Canadians looked at the Americans in amazement, then their eyes sought each other.

"We don't travel on Sunday," said Sutherland.

"But we're in a hurry, man," expostulated Springer.

"So are we," said Campbell. "But you'll get no good of traveling on the Lord's Day—when it is not a matter of necessity, you understand."

THE TWO NAVIGATE THE MACKENZIE

The man's voice was earnest. He was not preaching, he was stating what he felt was a fact, and it was the Americans' turn to search each other's faces.

"Then you're goin' to pull in here and camp till Monday mornin'?" asked Slim.

"That's just it."

Kansas smiled.

"We couldn't do that, Campbell. We have our pardners hurryin' around by the other trail with them horses, and we got to get to Dawson."

The Canadians bent to their oars.

"You'll get no good of your hurry, I'm afraid," said Campbell. "We would have liked your company, but if that's your mind here is where we part. Good-bye to you."

"And good luck," added Sutherland as the boat drew off toward shore.



Chapter X

THE TWO REACH THE DIVIDE

BETWEEN East Mountain and West, the Sans Sault Rapids extended halfway across the river, the water rushing down over a ledge of rock reaching out from the east shore; but the Mackenzie here was over a mile wide, and all the men noticed as they rowed down close to the west shore was the quickening of the current and the roar of the turmoil opposite.

"They sure don't amount to nothin'," was Slim's disappointed verdict.

Forty miles below the rapids the river narrowed to five hundred yards, and with unaccelerated current entered the mouth of a canyon. The men surveyed this bottle-neck with interest. Vertical cliffs of creamy-white painted in level streaks with bluish-green marked the gate, a steep slope of crumbled rock falling from their feet into the water.

"Good place for an ice-gorge," remarked Kansas.

"Bet it makes a flood, too," agreed Slim. "Great Snakes! Look at that!"

High on an inaccessible shelf a hundred feet above the river lay the rotting frame of a boat. The Klondikers stared.

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"Well!" declared Springer. "One flood has left a marker that nobody can contradict."

For ten miles they rowed between the creamy walls that were reflected, from the pricking of evergreens on their summit to the tumble of rocks at their base, in the glassy surface of the river. They speculated on the depth of the channel beneath them that made possible such silent unhurried flow. At length the stream grew wider, the cliffs became less impressive, Manitou Island blocked the view, came abreast, passed astern, and they put in to shore at Fort Good Hope.

At the red painted buildings of the post, Kansas and Slim completed their outfit for the Arctic winter.

"It stands to reason we'll pay two prices for just the same things at Dawson," said Kansas.

So they purchased good blankets for their beds, hooded parkas, woolen mittens, and extra snowpacks to supplement the ones that Bennett had given them. They stood at the counter, shoulder to shoulder with the skin-clad Esquimaux, and when they went back to their camp with their purchases, several of the friendly little people followed them. As Kansas unrolled his bed to put in his new blankets and exposed the gay Navajo rug that covered his quilts a cry of delight broke from the audience. One man seemed to be particularly excited, and laid his hand pleadingly on the cowman's arm. A frightened small boy was dragged up to interpret.

"He says, please, you wait," whispered the child, and Kansas accordingly stood while the Esquimau ran to where his walrus-hide canoe was lying on the shore. He returned with a robe of dressed red fox skins. He spread it down on the ground fur side up and lying on it wrapped it about him. Then he rose and held it up to the white man showing that it would be amply long for him. He would exchange it for the Navajo blanket, he indicated, and Kansas was ready enough for the trade. He buried his fingers in the thick, soft fur and wished that Kitty might see it.

After supper they watched the steam-scow *Enterprise* come up the river, dock, unload, take on her freight, and chuff off upstream.

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Then they walked up the path to the post with the factor who had been superintending the work at the wharf, and as they walked they fanned with the leafy twigs they carried at the mosquitoes that swarmed about their heads. The evening was still and these pests were at their obnoxious worst.

"See those logs?" asked the factor, pointing to a pile of old sticks, strangely dark-blue in color. "You'd never guess what we use those for."

"They don't look exactly fit for firewood," observed Slim. "Been under water, ain't they?"

"They've been under water for years," assented the factor. "And they make the finest paint you ever saw. We burn them and use the ashes. We've painted all these buildings with it."

"But they're red," remonstrated Springer.

"That's so," said the factor. "And the bluer the logs are, the redder the paint will be. Queer, isn't it? Poplar wood is best.

"Have you fellows seen the Midnight Sun yet?" he went on. "You can get a good view of it from that hill back there. Good Hope Hill we call it. It's quite a sight. You ought to take it in to-night if you have nothing else to do."

Thus advised the five climbed up past the little garden of the Catholic priest where a black-garbed brother was weeding his turnips and radishes. He straightened his back and wished them "Good evening" with the ready friendliness of the North. They commented on the luxuriance of his vegetable patch.

"Long hours of sunshine," he explained. "Our summer is short, but intense while it lasts. Brother Kearney who was here before me used to grow potatoes, but I haven't had luck with them."

On the hill above the settlement they sat to watch the great orange ball of the sun. The sky was a deep, tender blue above their heads and sunset colors flooded the north where little clouds floated with edges of fire. Below the eminence on which they were, the houses in their gardens broke an interminable carpet of sparse evergreens and aspens, and the Mackenzie issuing from the Ramparts cut through its texture with lines and pools of silver. Beyond the post the river spread out into the likeness of a lake with low,

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indented shores. No mountains were visible, the plain losing itself on every hand in a dim, purple haze. This haze drew a veil of crimson along the lower margin of the northern sky, and into it the sun dipped, turning from orange to ominous blood-red. Larger than any moon the men had ever seen it hung in the band of crimson, prodigious, flaming, while they held their breath in an almost painful suspense. For a few minutes it seemed to be rolling eastward, then by imperceptible degrees it rose through the veils of mist, laying aside its trappings of color to take on the white blaze of day.

"That certainly was worth coming a long way to see," declared Springer, and the others enthusiastically agreed.

A day of drizzling rain and some headwind that reduced to nothing the scant help of the sluggish current made progress slow across the twenty miles of the "Grand View," that widening of the Mackenzie below the post, and as wooded point succeeded wooded point, each one like the last, appearing from the mist ahead and vanishing again into the mist astern, the men felt like rowers bewitched on some watery treadmill that mocked them with this recurring shore. Then, when the rain was gone, when the river was narrow again, the low-swinging sun that never set made no division between day and day. They marked the time by the islands passed, by the sandbanks avoided, by the ruins of Old Fort Good Hope gliding astern; and after the horseshoe bend to the west, when the river seemed to run uphill to crowd its waters between the steep, confining walls of the Narrows, by the distant ranges of the Rockies, first seen like a vision shimmering in haze and slowly drawing nearer across the water-soaked plain.

On July fifteenth just two months from the day when the Wyoming men had launched their skiff on this river journey, the streams divided into confusing channels, the surface of the water began to lift and fall in a rhythmic surge under the lash of the north wind, and savor of salt was on their lips. They had reached the Mackenzie Delta. The river was running north again, this much they knew, and that the Peel River would come in from the west near its mouth they had learned from Ogilvie's description

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of the portage, which Kansas had bought in Edmonton. The difficulty was to determine which mouth. They worked westward to the broadest channel they could find, and when Kansas had killed a giant moose on an island and they had landed to secure the meat, they climbed to the top of the low dune to take what bearings they could. A maze of silver waterways to the east of them divided the green plain into countless islands. Here and there an occasional tree, spruce or balsam-poplar, a vigorous, sturdy little giant centuries old, stood twenty feet or more above the general growth that cowered against the ground. To the north the wide channel they had been following met the sky, and mistakenly they thought this was the sea. They must surely be on the right track and to the left they should find the Peel, but hours of exploring left-hand channels led nowhere. At last they came on a band of Esquimaux with whom they stopped to trade moose meat for the reindeer skins that Slim and Fritz and Thomas wanted as covering for their beds. They could not make the little yellow men understand about the Rat River, the stream from the mountains for which they were searching, but the names of the Peel River and Fort Macpherson brought answering smiles, and one man knelt and drew a map with a stick on the sand at their feet. It was obvious the Klondikers had come miles too far down the Delta toward the sea. Turning back they rowed up with an incoming tide, and a day later came through a narrow channel to a broad stream that they now could feel certain was the Peel.

Fort Macpherson was over thirty miles up the river, but as the men had no business which would take them to the post, they could turn west as soon as they found the mouth of the Rat River. Ogilvie's description gave them no guiding landmark; they could but watch for a tributary coming in from the west. With a favoring breeze they sailed up against the current, scanning the low shores fringed with aspen and slender, stunted evergreens for some break other than the meandering downward channels of the Delta. When the wind grew contrary, they got out the lariat for a towing rope, and still watching for a stream with an incoming current they tracked up the Peel's western shore, three men at the line, and

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one in each of the boats, hitched bow-to-stern, to fend them off the rocks with an oar. On the second day they came to a stream emptying into the Peel and made camp.

"This guide-book of Ogilvie's," explained Kansas, "says that he found the Rat so shallow that only a boat of the lightest draft could be used. I figure we might as well stop here as anywhere and make over the *California*."

"She won't be much use on that kind of stream as she is," admitted Springer.

They hauled the boats up and unloaded them both. Then, using for their model the skiff that Jack Graham had designed, they cut down and rebuilt the larger craft. They worked slowly because of the necessity of saving planking and nails, and even for the five of them it was a task which took a day and a half. Other parties came in and camped beside them while they worked, but they were too busy to give any heed. They were applying the last pitch to the finished hull when a chuckle from the latest comers fell on their ears.

"Well! if here aren't those Sabbath-breaking Yankees!" said a vaguely familiar voice, and they all turned and stared.

The two lean Canadians, guests at their Fourth of July banquet, had just drawn their boat up on the shore. Campbell, who had spoken, sat astride the bow steadying it, while Sutherland, standing in the stern his arms akimbo, surveyed them with good-humored mockery, over the humped canvas covering the load.

"I'm fair surprised you have not got further than this," he declared, "with all the hurry you were in."

The Americans grinned shamefacedly.

"We got lost in the Delta," volunteered Slim.

John Campbell nodded his head.

"I'm thinking I told you no good would come of hurrying on the Lord's Day. And what are you up to now?"

"We're makin' over the big boat to go up this river," explained Kansas.

"And what will you be going up this river for?" queried the Scot.

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"We've heard," drawled Kansas, "that the nearest way to the Divide is up the Rat River."

"Leastways," corrected Slim, "a Canadian guide-book he bought in Edmonton told him so."

"That's right," said Campbell. "But this is not the Rat River."

"Hell!" ejaculated Slim.

"The Rat River is probably twenty miles from here," remarked Sutherland drily.

"Slim," said Kansas, "it's plain to me we made a great mistake in ever leavin' these God-fearin' men get away on us."

"You never spoke a truer word, pardner. But we ain't aimin' to make the same mistake twice. Step ashore, you two, and tell us what you know about the Rat River."

What the Canadians knew was most circumstantial, for Campbell had talked with the factor at Fort Good Hope and he had a diagram as well as a description of the wooded island that marked the mouth of the Rat. From the Peel they were to go into the Husky River, a branch of the Peel that flowed out to the Arctic, and about fifteen miles down the Husky they could reach the Rat.

"From where we are now we take the first right-hand river, then the next left-hand, and then keep the main channel," concluded Campbell.

The Californians and the Wyoming men now divided their freight and each packed their own boat. The parties were once more independent of each other, but they set out together following the lead of the Canadians. On July twenty-first at breakfast time they came to the mouth of the Rat, and all that forenoon they rowed up the winding river that moved sluggishly across the green plain. In the afternoon when the current became faster they clambered out on the high muddy banks with their towlines. It was easy tracking with no timber to avoid, and they could scan the undulating ridge of the Rockies before them. The mountains looked tame enough to the men from Wyoming used to the rugged pinnacles and cliffs of the Big Horns. Their gradual grassy slopes and rounded, regular outline seemed to present no great obstacle.

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"The highest of 'em would be lost in Paint Rock Basin," declared Slim in disgust. "And God knows that's where our high country begins."

"I have an idea they'll seem plenty high enough before we get over them, though," remarked Springer thoughtfully.

The second day the going was a little more varied. The river widened into a series of irregular lakes where the men could row, but between these openings were crooked channels where they had to scramble under and around low willows that fringed the banks with a tangled growth which harbored hordes of venomous mosquitoes and savage "bull-dogs," as large as bees and each armed with a sting like a red-hot dagger.

"It's lucky they don't leave a hump the size of their sting," said Kansas, as he tenderly rubbed a wound on his arm, "or we'd sure swell plumb out of our clothes."

Toward evening they came suddenly to the beginning of fast water. Tents stood clustered at the foot of the first cascade and the ring of hammers announced that the Klondikers were rebuilding their boats. A snarl of wreckage at the edge of the shore marked the failure of at least one party to navigate the rapid, and some wag had set up a board above the melancholy collection indicating in drunken capitals the name of the settlement. DESTRUCTION CITY, it read.

After they had made their camp, the men walked up by the side of the stream to examine the way ahead of them. The water above the cascade rushed and shouted over rocks and ledges. There was no possibility of tracking from the shore for the only practicable channel for a boat was far out in the center of the creek.

"Looks like we're goin' to have to wade," observed Kansas.

A half mile above the camp they came in sight of a party of five men who were struggling to get a boat upstream, straining unbelievably to gain inches. They watched in silence.

"It's just about enough for five men to do," remarked Sutherland, at last.

"Lucky we cut down the *California*," said Springer.

They made their way back to Destruction City, hopping care-

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fully from stone to stone along the margin of the water, and the more they studied it the more ominous it seemed. With new eyes they inspected their three boats, lying on the shore.

"Of course they are smaller than that one we seen up there." Slim tried to sound assured.

"But I'm thinking it's more than two men can manage to put one of them along," observed John Campbell uneasily.

"We might pack your load and ours together," suggested Kansas. "The four of us could sure take one boat through, and probably be able to help Springer if it gets too stiff for him."

The idea met with instant approval, and the four set about repacking for an early start, transferring both loads to the Canadians' skiff.

"One thing," remarked Slim. "We sure won't have to save space in this boat for no passengers."

"We're walking from here on, without a doubt," agreed Sutherland.

The reloaded skiff led the way when they started the next morning. Two men walked ahead with the towrope and picked out the channel, one waded at the bow of the boat and one at the stern. The *California* followed behind. The icy water tore about the men's waists, clutching their legs as with detaining arms, the slimy stones of the river-bed slid and turned under their feet, and the heavy boats, caught in the surface current, jerked and staggered like things alive. The men bent to the stream, but with all their weight at times could do little more than hold the boat. Then some one would shout, and they would all jerk together in time to the shouting and forge ahead step by step. The stream gave them no respite. When, breathless and with aching muscles, they had gained the top of the first cascade, the smooth, unbroken chute of water above nearly took them off their feet, and they found the tremendous weight of this unvarying, hurrying current a nightmare enemy to combat. They struggled with it until they could fight no longer, but had to drop back into the shallows by the bank, where they propped their shaking bodies against the grounded boats and drew the air into laboring lungs with the

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whistling gasps of exhaustion. But they dared not delay long enough to get their breath completely for the boats were all the time grinding on the rocks, and each time they pushed out into the stream the distance they could cover was less, until at last after an hour of agonizing effort they found themselves back in an eddy from which they had started. They had only strength enough to make up the distance they lost when they dropped back to shore. It was no use attempting it again.

Kansas wiped the sweat from his eyes with his shirt-sleeve, and surveyed the sky.

"It's quittin' time anyway, boys," he said, indicating with a jerk of his head the rosy hue above them. "When this sky gets that pink it's more than bed time."

The day was over and they had advanced a mile. Stiffly they maneuvered the boats to a place of safety and climbed out on the bank, where gnats and mosquitoes rose in swarms to greet them. After a rapid supper of bread and bacon and coffee they made their beds to windward of their murky smudge fires and crawled between their blankets too tired to care if they were still hungry. Kansas was just dropping off to sleep when Campbell nudged him.

"To-morrow is Sunday," said the Scot.

"That's all right with me," replied the cowman without opening his eyes.

After a day of rest they faced the river with renewed courage, but even with this advantage they made only two miles, and Springer became so exhausted that he was unable to keep up with his share of the work. The others had to return to the last eddy and bring his boat to the camping-place while his partners half lifted him along the shore. By common consent they waited another day to give him a chance to recover. The cowpunchers and the Canadians scouted along the river bank for several miles to find no break in the unvarying monotony of swift water, but they did not tell Springer of this when they returned to camp and found him sitting, whitefaced, on a stone by the fire. Nor did they speak of the discouraged parties they had met retreating down the river. Rather

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they described how they had seen the notch of McDougall's Pass from the top of a hill they had climbed.

"It doesn't look very far," said John Campbell.

Springer made a deprecatory gesture.

"It's no use, boys," he said. "I can't keep up with you and I won't hold you back. We've been talking it over, Thomas, Fritz and I, and we've made up our minds to camp here for a few days. Some short-handed party may come along and be glad to double-load with us for the sake of extra help. But if not, we'll go back to Fort Macpherson. A party passed here this afternoon that is going there to wait for the winter and cross with dogs. We can do that. We don't have to get to Dawson before navigation closes as you do, Kansas, so we can afford to take more time."

The others reluctantly admitted this might be a good plan.

"We'd sure like to have you with us," said Slim, "but perhaps you'd better take it slower than us."

"I know I had," said Springer with a smile. And he was still smiling when he saw them off the next day.

They labored along against the current in silence to their first breathing-place. Then Sutherland spoke.

"I don't like his looks," he said, and no one needed to ask of whom he was speaking. "I just hope he goes back to Macpherson."

They were entering the mountains and the water poured past them with even a quicker pace, but the four pushed on against it at the rate of five miles a day. There were places now where they had to take out part of their load and carry it up the shore to a quieter stretch before they could bring the boat through, and again they had to unload entirely and portage boat and all. But they worked with a will, for they were moving faster than the stream of travel and were passing parties every few hours. Near the Big Bend where the river came out from the west the boat sprang a leak and they had to stop to caulk it, which gave them an unplanned chance to rest and prepare themselves for a struggle with a rushing cataract that was almost a fall. The second Sunday found them in a fine camp on a river bend across from a steep gravel hill,

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with a cheering view up the reach of tumbled water to McDougall Pass that now looked close at hand.

They were content to lie in the smoke of their smudge fire under the shade of the stunted timber of the river bed and gaze through half-shut eyes at the smooth slopes of the mountains on either hand. There was no timber beyond the stream's banks. The high rocky tops of the hills gleamed naked in the sunshine; below was the bunched growth of sedges and low bushes.

"Looks almost like sage from this distance, don't it?" said Slim to Kansas. "Only it ain't so gray."

"There ain't nothing the color of sage here," observed his partner, "without it's this moss growin' down around the grass-stems. And there sure ain't nothin' that smells like sage does in the sunshine."

"God! No," said Slim with a long-drawn breath.

Occasionally they moved stiffly about the necessary tasks of camp, but they hardly raised their heads to watch the party of eleven French-Canadians who came in and camped beside them. Their fatigue was too great for any spurring of curiosity to overcome. They made a late start the following day, all four hesitating when all was ready, dreading to make the first step into the bitter cold water.

"I was lookin' at my toes last night," observed Slim, "and I was plumb surprised not to find no webs between them."

"The water's too cold for anything to sprout," remarked Campbell. "But that's all that saves us."

"Come on, boys," said Kansas. "It won't git no warmer while we look at it."

They plunged in and another week had begun. In the middle of the morning they heard a hail as they worked their way to the top of a rapid. Two haggard men with hollow eyes were sitting on a boulder in an eddy of the stream with their boat in slack water beside them. The smaller of the two spoke.

"You fellows came up that chute as if you thought you were going somewhere." His accents were bitter.

The four steadied the skiff between them and grinned.

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"We're aimin' to reach Dawson," said Kansas. Then he added after a glance ahead, "Some time."

The speaker on the rock laughed, a short bark of disdain. His companion started to say something, but a spasm of convulsive coughing interrupted and shook him, leaving him panting with blue lips when it had passed. He made a gesture to his friend.

"We thought that too when we left Chicago a year ago," said the shorter man. "But right here we changed our minds. We've been up looking at a canyon ahead a ways. Say! It makes the rest of these rapids look like a child's paddlebrook. You'd better turn back. All the gold in the Klondike isn't worth it."

But the four in the stream chose to disregard the warning, and they won through the canyon by taking parts of two days to do it, sleeping uneasily in their sodden clothes on the rocks halfway through, and plunging along the upper reach with a dangerously leaking boat. They came upon a scout from the French-Canadian party near the canyon's mouth. He had been sent ahead to look at the stream and he said that his party would turn back if his opinion had any weight. Yet beyond the canyon the Wyoming men with their Canadian friends found themselves actually entering the Pass, with the fall of the stream becoming noticeably less. They even came to places where they could track the boat from the banks with one man perched precariously on the load with a fending pole, and John Campbell promptly celebrated the easier going by slipping off the bank and falling ignominiously into the water.

"It's just that it's too easy for me now," was his sputtering excuse as he emerged.

Still the canyon was the barrier beyond which the other Klondikers seemed unable to penetrate for they came upon no other parties on the stream, nor did they find traces of their camps. They began to have glimpses of the wild life of the country. Muskrats for which the stream was named swarmed along these upper reaches. They swam ahead of the boat across the quieter pools or slipped hurriedly down muddy banks. A caribou, startled at its drinking, crashed through the willows and loped away, and white-

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winged ptarmigan that they miscalled partridges whirred up from the thickets as they passed. When they stopped to caulk their constantly leaking boat with moss the robins came and watched them with bright, curious eyes.

The creek was winding across a high plain where wild currants grew and such huckleberries and blueberries as the men had never seen, great globes of sweetness that they gathered for every meal. The creek forked, and following the factor's advice to keep to the main channel, they bent to the south. The third Sunday saw them camped on this upland. High peaks with snowy flanks surrounded them, and a cold wind whined through the Pass, driving before it gray flocks of cloud masses that drenched the men with a freezing drizzle. Yet they welcomed the rain which gave them a few hours' respite from the swarming gnats and mosquitoes, a few hours when they could take off their head-nets and breathe air free of smoke. They sat in their tent with sides and door flaps lifted, backs braced against the bundles of their stores and dozed, or pattered at little jobs like the mending of their much-suffering garments, and rejoiced in the luxury of the unimpeded breathing.

Above this Sunday's camp the valley grew narrower and the creek became so shallow that it was no longer possible to force the boat up the rapids. It must be unloaded, lifted out and carried around the obstruction. Again the creek forked and this time into three streams of equal depth. No one could have said which should be called the main channel, if Ogilvie's description had not mentioned a gorge that he came through at the forks. The western branch emerged from a rocky cut and up this brook they had to go. They unloaded the boat and packed their supplies up the rocks by the side of the water.

At the head of the gorge an uprooted tree had fallen across the stream damming it up into a cold, still pool. As Kansas laid down his last pack he saw the silver arc of a leaping trout above the quiet water. It was the work of a moment to get out his fishing tackle and while the others returned for the empty boat he dropped his fly into the shadow of the fallen tree. With a sing of the reel the line payed out and he had a beauty hooked, but it was too

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heavy to be taken from the water on his light line. Chuckling with excitement he played it up and down the pool, the fatigue of the trail forgotten, until he could tire it sufficiently to be able to bring it within the reach of his scooping cowpuncher's hat that he used for a landing net. It was the largest mountain trout he had ever seen, with large red spots like jewels on its silver sides.

"It must weigh four pounds," he muttered gleefully.

When the men appeared with the boat he had five of these fish sizzling over a fire. And the party with appetites whetted by weeks of unvaried ham and bacon ate them every one.

The brook they were following dwindled to a chain of pools connected by narrow channels where the men could neither row nor track but poled themselves along on the butt end of their oars. So progressing they came to a lake a mile wide.

"We must be near the Divide now, sure," asserted Kansas. "Mountain streams like this always start in lakes."

With the eagerness of explorers they bent to the oars, skirting the shore and watching with keen eyes for an incoming current, then parting the bushes, shoving, poling through another narrow stream. Three miles of it this time, back-breaking work. Then the silver sheen of open water reflected back to them the colors of the evening sky. Twice they circled the second little lake carefully, but they found no break in its shores save that made by the brook from which they had entered. They were at the top of the watershed. Silently they put Slim ashore near a little hill, and with poised oars they watched him climb to its top. He looked around and then waved his hat at them with a series of cowpuncher yells.

"I can see another lake," he shouted, "about a quarter of a mile away and she looks like she drains the other way."

He marked the line that their portage trail must take and descended to the lakeside. It was late enough to stop, but as they all wanted to see the lake that "drained the other way," each man took a load upon his back and followed Slim's lead. So they crossed all but the camping-equipment and the boat before they turned in for the night.

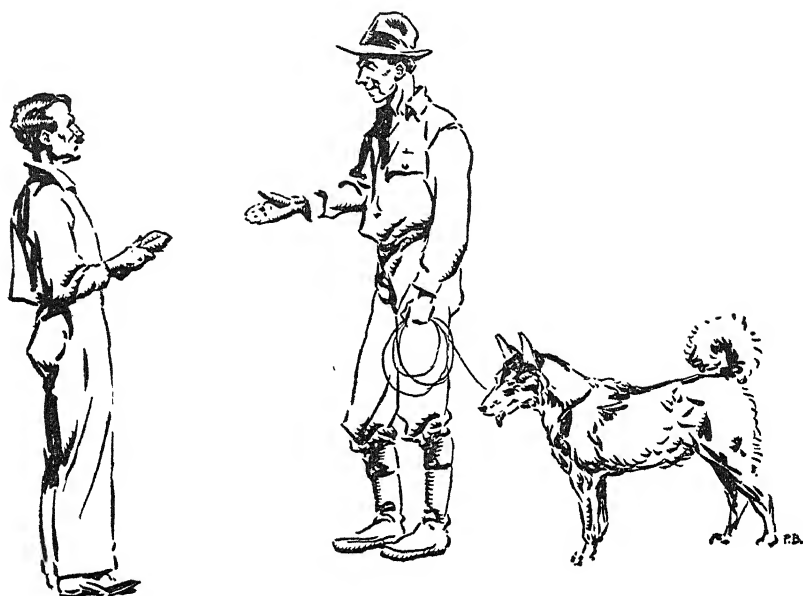
But in the morning when they had their boat, they discovered

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that the lake Slim had found had neither inlet nor outflowing brook. It lay in an unbroken cup of the upland, a giant spring four hundred yards across. From the top of a ridge at its western end they could see another and a larger lake, to which they spent a day in making their way, bringing all the freight to its shore before dark. They camped above it, part of an eerie scene. The upland stretched dreary and unbroken about them, faintly undulating under a carpet of moss. To east and north and south this moss was burning. Rosy lines of flame crept along the plain and the acrid smoke hung over the lake in dim blue layers. Against this background the figures of the men about the fire moved, magnified and portentous. And above the sound of the lapping water rose the humming drone of countless millions of gnats and mosquitoes driven before the fire. The men spent a night of torment even with their head-nets over their faces, and in the morning as they brought the boat across their portage, the swarming insects made a black covering over their shoulders that hid the texture of the shirts they wore.

"The hell of it is," mourned Slim, "they won't nobody ever believe you when you tells them the plain truth about these bugs."

They launched the boat and rowed along the shore peering under the bordering fringe of low bushes. And thus they came on a small outlet, very narrow and very deep. This time they all joined in the yell. Even the mosquitoes were unheeded. They had crossed the Continental Divide, and the way to Dawson, they now thought, should be all downhill. It was August twelfth, for it had taken them twenty-two days to cover the last forty-five miles.



Chapter XI

THE TWO DRIFT DOWN AND WORK UP

THE Klondikers spent a day and a half in getting into West Rat River, for short as their skiff was it proved too long to be worked past the twists and turns of the narrow channel they had found. They learned later that the custom was to portage to the river, but not knowing it, the four got out their miner's shovels and dug away the banks. They cut back the brush, and then since the matted undergrowth was too thick to admit of walking along the shore they plunged into the stream to pull and shove the boat along. To their astonishment they sank until the water reached halfway between waist and armpits. More than once a sudden deepening brought its level to their necks. It was impossible to get much purchase against the bottom, and it would have been difficult to move with speed at such depth in any water, but the numbing cold further retarded their progress. Little lakes or pools occasionally gave them breathing-space, but the intervals of rowing were never long enough to warm their blood, and the bitter cold

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of the mountain night added to their discomfort. Even in the shelter of his fox-fur robe Kansas shivered for hours before he grew warm enough to sleep, and Slim coughed almost incessantly. To get through the last narrow place they had to unload the boat, as it was all they could do to move it empty; but they were heartened at their labor by the nearing brawl of the larger stream.

The West Rat was as shallow as the first creek had been deep, but the men thought following the tortuous channel mere play, since, with the current helping them, they could make ten miles in the space of an afternoon, and when they reached the Bell River their troubles were over. Rapids had been left behind but still they could move at a moderate speed and with interested eyes they scanned the low banks wooded with spruce and poplar and birch beyond the inevitable willows. Among these trees they saw the log shacks of La Pierre's House, the outpost used by the Macpherson men in getting goods and furs over the Divide in winter. During the summers it was always empty and it now looked so deserted and forlorn that Kansas had to chuckle at a sudden memory.

"This here's the place, Slim," he said, "where Miss Anne's father was aimin' to trade them dogs he planned to use over the Divide for canoes."

"Well," replied Slim judicially, "he'd a sure been dead by the time he got here so it's just as well he was aimin' to trade at a dead post."

"I sometimes wonder how they're makin' out," said Kansas.

"Same here," returned the other soberly.

"Who's Miss Anne?" asked John Campbell curiously.

"Miss Anne?" Slim's judicial tone was even more marked. "She's hard to describe, but she sure wasn't hard to look at. Her father though—he has a head that's mighty near as soft as his heart, which is sayin' a lot. He's a good man, you understand, but in some ways he don't know straight up."

"They're travelin' with our pardners on the other trail," explained Kansas.

The river swept around Sinclair's Rock with quickened current,

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then it slowed down again and widened, made deeper by the added waters from the Stony and the Eagle rivers, and on August seventeenth it brought them to the Porcupine, losing itself in the shallow river which wound between low grassy banks across an irregular forested plain, broken here and there by low hills and ridges but by no great heights. Here the Klondikers could make their thirty-five or forty miles a day with little effort, and the two Canadians and Kansas soon showed the benefit of the easier going, recovering well from the exhausting work on the Divide. But Slim failed to make the same easy rebound. He still was racked by his cough, and all his profane denials could not hide the fact that he was often feverish and weak. He insisted on doing his full share of the work, however, resenting any attempts the others might make to spare him.

"Hell!" he would say. "I'm all right."

Beyond the first wide canyon below the mouth of the Bell River the Klondikers came on a camp of the La Pierre Indians and traded some extra flour for salmon trout, beautiful fish with silver sides spotted in scarlet and black and white and brown. The next day as they were caulking the boat, that was periodically aleak, Slim recurred to this encampment.

"Did you notice the tepees them Injuns had, Kansas?"

"Made of skins, you mean?"

"No. They didn't have no smoke holes. Had the sides raised all right to make a draft but no smoke vent on top. I looked into one and you couldn't see nothing four feet above the ground. Thick with smoke it was. Wouldn't you think fellows who could invent a trap to catch wild geese like that one the old geezer showed us would know enough to punch a hole to let out smoke! It must be bad in winter."

"Maybe they use cabins then, like the Mackenzie Indians," suggested Campbell. "But it is queer."

One day of high wind when they had the towing rope over their shoulders and were tracking down along the gravel beach of the riverside they rounded a curve to find themselves before a little cluster of canvas tents.

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"White men!" shouted Campbell in amazement.

"Miners!" added Kansas. "See their pans?"

Two men had indeed been busy panning on the bar but had stopped their work in equal astonishment at the sight of the boat and its crew.

"Howdy, chechakos!" was their greeting.

It was the first time the Klondikers had heard the title the North gives to its tenderfeet and they thrilled to the strange syllables. The party were old timers from Dawson, who were prospecting the sandbars of the Porcupine, so far without success, and they submitted to a bombardment of questions. Yes, there was plenty of gold in the Klondike region and more being found all the time, but prices were higher than kites. Nothing on the Porcupine at all. No, they need expect no trouble on the lower river. Fast current through the Ramparts, that is all. The Yukon would be very bad to go up against, and they would save time to wait at Fort Yukon for a steamer. The fort was two miles up the Yukon from where the Porcupine came in. Yes, on the east side of the river. A good many of the boats stopped there, particularly at this time of year. They ought not to have to wait long.

When the four tracked on down the river they felt a relief as if the end of the long journey were at last in sight. They chattered incessantly with the glee of irresponsible schoolboys, a mood of excitement and loquacity that lasted through the next day, which was Sunday. They lived over the incidents, humorous and near tragic, of their trail together. They caught up on the history of their separate journeys, before the meeting below Fort Norman. The Canadians had taken the route from Edmonton to the Great Slave Lake by the Athabaska River rather than the Peace, and John Campbell described the successive rapids, where they must be portaged and how they could be run, while Kansas took careful notes of it all in his diary with who knows what dim idea of coming that way again. It sounded shorter than Peace River.

They talked of Edmonton, of the party with the snow engine, and of the English lords with their complicated and seemingly extravagant equipment.

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"So that's where you got your sugar pills," said Campbell, chuckling. "I wondered. We saw those same fellows on the road, and I'm thinking that time the joke was on me. It was snowing very hard late one afternoon and a tall lean chap stumbled into our camp just as I was cooking bannocks for tea. It was dark, you see, and the fellow had been lost. We urged him to shake down in a tarpaulin with us until morning, but he said he'd have to get on or his party would be out hunting for him. He would take some bannocks and tea, he said, and, man, how he did eat. When he got up to go he told us to come over to his camp the next day (it would be Sunday) and have dinner. Then he went and we hadn't the faintest idea who he was.

"The next day Sutherland and I set out for the camp he'd described. We had washed our faces, I think, but that's all the preparation we made. And such a camp! Horses, over a hundred of them in a rope pen, tents in a semicircle for the leaders of the party and others for their servants and guides arranged all orderly behind them, for all the world like company streets in a military camp. We had dinner in a big eating-tent with a folding table to sit at and chairs to sit on, and men passing the food around behind our backs just like a banquet. And like a banquet, too, was the food. Tinned turkey and vegetables. A perfect feast, and we had given him bannocks and tea! Lord Avonmore was his name and he was chief of the party.

"Somehow I got an idea they weren't bound for the Klondike. Not from what they said, but rather from what they didn't say. They talked about everything but the Yukon. Still that might have been their idea of good manners. I've often wondered about them since. They had no idea of handling their horses in a cold country. They had lost twenty head already. And these half-wild beasts were new to them. One of the English servants shot a horse because it bucked when he was saddling it. Had never seen any action like it and thought the horse was having a fit. They had the greatest number of unwieldy picks too, four or five horses loaded with them. It was queer."

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Toward dusk Kansas looked up at the line of mountains behind them.

"It looks like it was stormin' up there. What do you say we stake that boat of ours? Then she'll be safe if the river was to raise on us."

They went down to the river, dragged the boat high up on the beach and fastened her to a stake pounded down securely in the gravel. Their beds they spread as usual on the bank above the stream. About three in the morning Kansas was awakened from a dream of being slowly buried in a snowdrift of sugar pills by tall Englishmen who used unwieldy picks, to find that the foot of his bed was under water. He sat up. The river stretched unbroken from his knees to the farther shore. Several yards out in the expanse the boat was jerking viciously at the rope which held the bow perilously low in the water by the short tether to the submerged stake. With a yell to awake the others he leaped from his wet blankets. They waded waist deep to reach the skiff which had in it everything they owned, except their beds and cooking utensils. By the time they had unfastened it and brought it in they were all so wet that it was impossible to think of further sleep. They accordingly despatched their breakfast and launched out on the stream, just as the storm, which had raised the flood in the mountains and followed down the river valley, overtook them with a cold cheerless drizzle.

Before many hours had elapsed they were conscious that the water on which they were rowing had quickened its pace. The banks of the river loomed gradually higher through the wavering curtain of the rain, three hundred feet, five hundred feet above them. The even outline of the slopes was broken by fantastic pinnacles, by crags, at last by cliffs that glowed luminous through the downpour, pure white at their upper margin and shading through all the tints of cream to deepest yellow, washed across by streaks of red. They were entering the Ramparts, borne on by water that was rushing now with silent resistless haste. A band of dark basalt appeared high up on the rocks above their heads and as the canyon grew narrower this band descended, taking in more

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and more of the cliff until the whole gorge was somber and full of shadows. Once and again a stream cut through the walls in a deep gash now filled with the silver veils of rain.

Ten miles from the entrance to the canyon they saw the sturdy log buildings of Rampart House, the post and the Mission, where they pulled in to seek shelter from the storm, as they thought for a few hours, but where they remained for two days while the rain sluiced down. Mr. Bawkesley, the Church of England missionary, gave them a warm welcome, and noticing Slim's coughing would not hear of their leaving until the rain had stopped.

"The post here is abandoned, you see, and we are moving the Mission down to Fort Yukon," he told them, "so the school building is empty. You're welcome to stop there as long as you wish. At least you will have a tight roof over your head. At the rectory we have a library if you like books, and at the church is a fine organ, and other musical instruments if you care to use them."

He sent an Indian over to build a roaring fire in the schoolhouse stove and to point out the store of dry wood.

"You use," said the Indian. "No take him Fort Yukon."

Thus bidden they stoked the stove and spread blankets and canvas over the children's desks to dry. Extra clothing, flour and salt, all was draped or arranged within reach of the heat.

"You'll sleep dry to-night, Slim," said Campbell, "and have a chance to get rid of that cold."

"Sure!" said the cowman carelessly. "I'll drop it right here."

In a pause between showers they ran over to the church and explored the store of musical instruments. Kansas found a violin with all its strings intact, and Slim took the organ-bench while Sutherland worked the blower. Campbell sat in the front pew improvising a tenor to the airs the others played, and if the din they made had more spirit than melody, Mr. Bawkesley was nonetheless pleased. Every now and then he thrust a beaming face in at the door and called for more. During the day he was busy with his two helpers in preparing the Mission equipment for transportation down the river, but in the evening he gathered them all, guests and workers, at the rectory in his fine library, a room of

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which he was justly proud, and which was to be the last dismantled.

By the second day the Klondikers were putting in their leisure time nailing boxes and roping bales which the missionary and his assistants had packed. At first they whistled cheerily at their work while the rain drummed a steady monotone on shingles and window-panes, but as the day wore on they were ready enough for any interruption, and when there came a hail from the river they all trooped out to welcome the newcomers. Kansas was the first to recognize the wiry man in the stern of the boat, with his keen eyes, his gray hair that almost touched his shoulders, and the mustache and small chin beard of the typical Indian fighter.

"Damned if it ain't Buffalo Jones!" he exclaimed to Mr. Bawkesley. "What can he be doin' here?"

"Buffalo Jones?"

"Yes. He's a hunter of wild animals. Takes 'em alive. He has a whole ranch of buffalo at his home in Kansas or Nebraska. Do you suppose he's turned prospector in his old age?"

But Colonel Jones, it appeared, had not changed his occupation. He was returning from an expedition into the Barren Lands after musk ox, and he had not the least interest in the Klondike.

"It will prove to be a much overestimated region in my opinion," he told Mr. Bawkesley, and added that he had no intention of making the side-trip to the gold fields. He was on his way home and would go at once down-river from Fort Yukon.

That evening in the library he expatiated more fully on the theme, mourning the results of what he considered a false excitement. He described the crowding Klondikers on the Rat River.

"In some places the parties are not a hundred yards apart, but they are still far below the Divide. The leaders are strung along higher up, yet I doubt if more than the first five or six of them get through this year. There's a lot of sickness among them already, the grippe mostly now, but they're sure to get scurvy later when they come to winter there. Few of them are used to camping out and none of them know anything about the Arctic. The Indians can't help them, for they're all sick with the grippe, and many

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of them are dying. Those who can move will give the whites a wide berth. I'm afraid naming that camp at the rapids Destruction City will prove a grim jest before they're through."

Mr. Bawkesley asked him about his interest in buffaloes.

"I used to hunt them for the skins, but any one could see they were being killed off faster than they could breed. So I got the idea of trying to raise some, of capturing some calves alive and bringing them up."

"It must have been frightfully dangerous," gasped the missionary.

"Well, it was pretty lively at times. The first calf I roped I left the lasso tied to my saddle while I fastened its feet, and the cow heard it bellowing and charged down on me before I was through. I managed to get on my horse, but I hadn't time to loosen the lasso. All I could do was ride round and round using that calf as a pivot, with the cow after me, until I was lucky enough to shoot the old girl. The second one I tried to catch by the tail. You know how they run with their tails cocked up over their backs. I thought I could hold it back and slow it down till the herd got out of the way. But when I leaned out to grab it my horse thought I was giving a signal to swerve, and he turned right into the calf. We all went down in a heap together and it looked like my hunting days were over right at the beginning. But the horse managed to scramble up and you bet I was on his back. He lit on his four feet a-running, you might say. After that we hit on the plan of coming up with a herd and running them until the calves were too exhausted to keep up. We'd let 'em drop a good way behind and then we could round 'em up at our ease."

"I'll bet it wasn't plumb easy even then," ventured Kansas.

Buffalo Jones grinned.

"Even a calf can kick like two Missouri mules," he admitted. "Only harder and faster."

"What started you after musk ox?" asked Mr. Bawkesley.

"I've always wanted to try them ever since I first heard about them, but it seemed like I never had time to make the trip until last year."

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He had left Kansas in June of 1897, going in from Edmonton by way of the Athabaska River to Fort Providence on the Great Slave Lake. He made up his party there, securing Indians and a Mr. John Rea of the Hudson's Bay Company to go with him.

"There was a lot of red tape about it, for I had brought some shepherd dogs with me, and it's against the Canadian law to hunt musk ox with dogs. But I just had to have those dogs to bring my calves home, and at last we got it all fixed up. We went up the lake to Fort Reliance at the eastern end and we waited there for the snow to get heavy enough for our dog-teams. We were carrying a lot of condensed milk for the calves as well as our own food, so there was quite a train of us.

"We hadn't told the Indians what we were going to do. They thought it was an ordinary hunt till we got over in the Dubawnt River country and saw our first musk ox. When I wouldn't shoot the bulls and just chased the cows and calves, they wanted to know what it was all about. When we told 'em we were going to capture some calves they did their best to stop us. They said if we took the calves out of the country the old ones would follow them and they and their tribes would have nothing left for meat. We couldn't persuade them that there was no danger of this, and when they saw they couldn't make us change our minds they stampeded the herd we were after and deserted us in the night. Rea was a good sport, though, and he and I went on alone, but we went north almost to Chesterfield Inlet before we saw any musk oxen again.

"I found you can't hunt musk ox calves as I had buffalo. Musk oxen don't run when they are scared, not even when wolves are after them. They form up in a circle with their heads out, and they put the calves inside. They have very long, sharp horns and the Esquimaux say they have never seen a horn knocked off or even broken. We couldn't get anywhere scaring musk oxen. Our only way was to follow and watch for the chance of finding some calves off by themselves. We followed and watched for days till at last we caught five young ones off with an old cow. Then we shot the cow and lassoed the five calves. We tied their four feet together and got out the towing rope. I had halters fastened to this rope

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with swivels about twelve feet apart. We staked the rope high enough up to escape their heads and then we let them up. They put up a pretty exhibition of temper, and we had to wait several days more till they got over their excitement enough to feed.

"All there was left to do was to tow 'em back to Fort Reliance, but we found that was plenty. We tied the rope to the back of the sled and then we let loose our shepherd dogs, but we made only three miles that first day. The calves sat down, and when the dogs nipped them to get them up they suddenly scrambled to their feet and charged. As the dogs kept in their rear they had to change ends to fight them and they soon became tangled. But they had rope enough to butt either of us over when we tried to get them free again. It was a long day, and at night we had to guard them against the wolves. We had very little sleep during the weeks we traveled with them until we got near to Slave Lake again. Finally when we were only one day out from Reliance, we woke in the morning to find them all dead. Their throats had been cut. There were moccasin tracks in the snow, so we knew the Indians had seen to it that we didn't take them out of the country."

The following day dawned clear and the Klondikers were early on their way. For ten miles more they slipped down between the canyon's overshadowing walls, across the Alaskan boundary, past Old Rampart House with the mute witness of its tragically large graveyard, past the ruins of a fort, and at last past Howling Dog Rock where the cliffs suddenly gave back and the river wound out on a wide plain. The banks were now only a few feet above the level of the stream, and occasional glimpses through the timber showed no hills in any direction. With steady, slow current the river moved on, reflecting the trees that leaned over the cut-banks on its curves. Now and then the Klondikers passed camps of Indians which they noticed were all picketed with little red flags.

"They must have smallpox," observed Sutherland.

Meanwhile Slim's cold had become a serious matter that alarmed them all. They insisted that he should be a passenger and sit in the bottom of the skiff with his back braced against the load.

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"We're making fifty miles a day and we're not needing four at the oars," said Sutherland.

"If you're aimin' to get a job of work on that steamer," added Kansas, "you'll have to rest up."

Slim growled and protested but they wrapped him up in blankets and Campbell produced a hidden flask of Scotch whiskey, a part of which he administered firmly and as firmly restored the balance to its hiding-place, in spite of the labored coughing of his companions. Warmed inside and out, Slim slept heavily. He did not even wake when the others overtook a raft on which two brown men were propelling eighteen fine dogs downstream. The nearest dogs rose and put their paws on the gunwale of the boat to sniff at the sleeping man, but Slim did not stir.

"Takin' 'em to Dawson?" asked Kansas.

"If we can't sell 'em at Fort Yukon. We thought we could trade 'em to the Indians, but they're all sick with smallpox."

"I thought those were quarantine flags," said Sutherland.

"They're quarantined all right, and they're dying like everything, poor devils. What's the matter with your partner?"

"He's all right," said Kansas quickly. "He's just wore out. We came over the Divide from Rat River."

The brown men stared.

"With this boat? No wonder he's worn out! We came around with the dogs from Fort Macpherson and that was bad enough. Yet they carried the stuff, so all we had to do was walk."

Kansas and Campbell let go their hold on the raft and the water widened between the two craft.

"When you get to Fort Yukon tell 'em we're coming," said the first raftsman.

On the evening of August twenty-seventh the Klondikers navigated through the maze of islands at the mouth of the Porcupine into the muddy waters of the Yukon and paddled the two miles up to Fort Yukon. The fort they found had been abandoned long years before and its buildings had been torn down to supply wood for the steamers until little of them remained save the sturdy stone chimneys. An Indian village clustered forlornly near the ruin and

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there were the wharves and warehouses maintained by the trading companies. The river here was miles wide, but the channel was filled with numberless low islands which looked as if they had been placed there yesterday by the hurrying current and might be swept away to-morrow.

They moored the skiff for the last time, by the side of the steamship wharf. They chose a grassy spot above the river for their camp and dropped their bedrolls as a sign of occupancy, then after cooking their supper over a fire on the sandy river bank they carried the scanty remnants of their supplies out to the end of the wharf there they would be ready to load. As Slim still felt too unsteady on his feet to attempt unnecessary walking they sat by their goods and smoked. The sun had set and the clouds hung in bands of rose across the pale green of the western sky, the colors reflected in the twisting channels of the river. Little squadrons of geese and wild ducks were coming in for the night, circling to settle on the islands. The only sounds were the calls of these birds, the purl and whisper of the water among the piles, and low voices and occasional laughter from the Indian village; then faint and far away came the hoot of a steamer's whistle.

The four men got to their feet. A moving plume of smoke was visible to the north. A white man appeared from a shack near the wharf and a few Indians strolled down from the village. The white man unlocked the warehouses and they all went inside. Presently the Indians reappeared carrying barrels and boxes to the forward end of the wharf, while the white man followed with invoice sheets and checking pencil to direct the separation of the goods according to destination.

"Looks as if you expect her to come in," remarked Campbell.

The wharf manager nodded.

"When she whistles she's coming in."

"I calls that luck," said Kansas as the four went to their camping-place to get their beds.

"I say, look at that!" Sutherland was pointing up the river.

A team of eighteen dogs was scampering up the sand with a man

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running by its side. A line led from the traces to the raft in the river which the second man was keeping clear of the shore.

"Those half-breeds are goin' to catch the steamer, too," observed Kansas.

"You know them?" marveled Slim.

"We passed 'em this mornin' when you were asleep."

When they returned they found the wharf manager, also, watching the oncoming outfit with interest, and as the raft arrived alongside he moved to the edge of the wharf to offer what assistance he could.

"Fine dogs you have," he said.

The dog-driver mopped his wet face with his sleeve, and in so doing knocked back his hat, revealing a white forehead and fair hair in odd contrast to his dark eyes and his tan.

"Why! They're white men," ejaculated Sutherland, taken un-
awares.

The dog-driver and his partner grinned.

"I don't blame you for thinking us Indians, but we're white men all right, and from the U. S. A. California, to be exact."

"Fine dogs, you have," reiterated the wharf manager.

"None better," returned the dog-driver promptly. "We're going to try to sell them to the steamer's captain for a passage to Dawson."

"My company would give you fifteen apiece for them."

The dog-driver considered this.

"If you could make it twenty we'd close with you. We paid eighteen for them at Macpherson, you see. They're pure-bred Esquimaux, well-broken and strong."

"I'll get my dust and my scales," said the wharf manager. "And if I have enough dust to give you twenty ounces apiece, we will settle now."

"Ounces!" cried the dog-driver. "I thought you were talking of doll—" A savage punch in the side from his partner cut him short.

"Twenty ounces goes if you have it," said the second American. "If not, we'll wait and try our luck on the steamer."

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"But, Olds," expostulated the dog-driver, when the manager was out of hearing, "that's over three hundred dollars a dog."

"We're in Alaska now," returned the other. "He wouldn't be in such a hurry to settle if he wasn't sure we could get just as much from the steamer people."

The dust was produced and weighed and the dogs changed hands.

"Now, partner," said the man named Olds, "there are two sides to this picture. Prices are evidently high in this country. I figure we have just about as much in pocket as if we had been mining a year, and paying for our living out of what we got. I'm not so in love with the winter in these parts that I want to put in another one. What do you say to letting this Dawson steamer go by, and taking the next one for home?"

His partner pondered a bit before he spoke.

"Gold brings twenty dollars an ounce in San Francisco. A dog apiece will more than pay our passage home."

Slim and Kansas watched the two moving their dunnage up the bank.

"It looks like we didn't make no mistake in roundin' up them horses," remarked Slim, "if dogs brings three hundred dollars a head."

The *Oil City* proved to be a stern-wheeler loaded with freight for Circle City and Dawson, and her captain was ready to ship four extra hands as freight handlers at ten dollars a day and board. The Klondikers tried not to blink at these wages. They were given a cabin together where the four stowed their belongings and slept when not otherwise employed.

For six days the steamer struggled up the stream among the islands that filled the stretch of river between Fort Yukon and Circle City. Once they stopped to pull the *Julia* off a sandbar, three times they went aground themselves and the last time the rudder was so damaged that over half a day was spent in its repair. The duties of the new members of the crew consisted in taking turns on watch at the bow with pole and line, and "singing out" the depth of the water to the pilot. The channels changed from week to week and no one could tell beforehand what to ex-

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pect. Every night they "wooded up" from piles of fuel arranged along the shore by the choppers of the North American Transportation and Trading Company. This was arduous work for Slim, for twenty-five cords were taken on at one time, but at Circle City all the new freight handlers were sure they had earned their pay. One hundred fifty cases of oil had to be carried up the steep bank to the N. A. T. warehouse, two cans in a case and a case at a time on a man's shoulder. Mosquitoes were ferocious and the cans were frequently leaking. Altogether the green hands found it a long half day, and they had no time for more than an indistinct impression of the famous mining camp. It was a blur to them of shacks, stores, and the flag-bedecked United States post office, and the customs house, and of men in overalls and boots standing on the bank.

Above Circle the river was clear of islands. The banks grew gradually higher and timber appeared on their slopes until the *Oil City* seemed to be steaming between forested mountains. They passed the cluster of tents known as National City and after a short stop at Eagle City, where shacks and store buildings were going up to the ring of hammers and the snarl of saws, they crossed the boundary back into Yukon. The Line was marked by a swathe cut through the forest from the river bank up over the mountains on either hand. They steamed by Forty Mile without a stop. The one-time center of the Yukon mining district was now a nearly deserted camp, the solid log structures, witness of the prosperity that had been, sheltering thirty or forty men who were watching the prospecting going on along the river, and who would start at the first promising rumor in one direction or another. Fort Cudahy, the Mounted Police station, and the prison for the criminal offenders in the district, stood a little separate from the town.

There was one more night of "wooding up," a night when the supply on the bank was insufficient and the freight handlers must chop as well as load; and then at noon on September ninth they rounded a sharp bend of the river, passing between mountains that dropped sheer to the water's edge. Before them on a flat was a crazy collection of tents and shacks like the random drift from some Brobdingnagian flood washed up even to the slope of the Knob that

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overshadowed the narrow plain. Here and there ragged trees showed that a forest had been cut away. Wooden buildings ranged themselves in a semblance of order along a ribbon of mud that was the main street paralleling the river. Piles of merchandise lined the top of the bank above the wharves while hundreds of boats of every description were tied or staked along the shore above and below the landing-place. There were three or four ranks of them lying side by side, steamers and scows, rafts and homemade boats and canoes, with and without masts, with and without cabins or canvas shelters, a few new and spruce, but most of them the dilapidated wrecks of a dangerous journey.

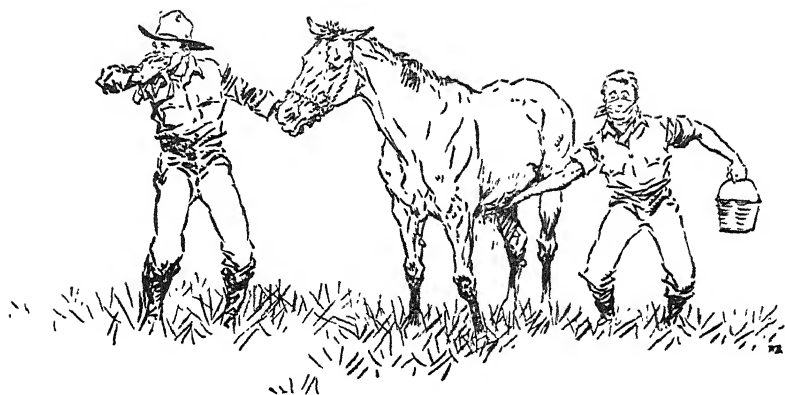
"Well, chechakos," said the captain jovially, "that's Dawson."

The two Wyoming men stood at the rail together.

"Jack Graham was right," said Kansas, "they ain't got a pasture staked out for horses."

Slim chuckled.

"Not yet, you mean," he said.



Chapter XII

THE HERD BECOMES A PACK TRAIN

PACKSADDLE GEORGE and Flapjack Charlie leaned against the counter in the Company store at Fort St. John. They were waiting for the factor, Mr. Gunn, to finish his business with the party of Klondikers whom the clerk had been serving. The leader of the Klondikers was impatient and inclined to be almost belligerent. The factor had been sympathetic with their disappointment, but now he spoke with an air of finality.

"We cannot outfit you until our boats return from the Landing. We expect them about June fifteenth. I'm sorry, but you may have noticed we are some distance from the railroad here, and this gold rush was hardly something we could foresee."

He turned to the listening horsewranglers.

"Looks to me," observed Flapjack, "as if you was about cleaned outa supplies."

Mr. Gunn smiled an apologetic assent.

"And our friend here," continued Packsaddle, "seems to be takin' the bad news personal."

"That's just about it," returned the factor with a wider grin.

"Does that mean," pursued Flapjack, "you can't even outfit one man bound for the Klondike? All I need is grub."

"All you need is—?" Mr. Gunn was obviously puzzled.

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"Food," elucidated Packsaddle.

"Oh! No, I'm sorry. Food is where we are short. But we expect our spring supplies about the middle of June."

"Flapjack, I expect I got to put up with your company for several weeks more. Mr. Gunn, we come in last night with a bunch a horses that I'm aimin' to take to Dawson and I want your advice about it. Jack Graham, down the river here, said I'd better put in the summer freightin' for you, if you could use me, and wait for the muskies to freeze over before goin' further."

"Then Jack hasn't heard of the new Police road."

"Road!"

"Yes. Inspector Moodie of the Northwest Mounted Police left here last winter to make a road for pack-trains to Dawson. Or rather to the headwaters of the Yukon. He got as far as Fort Graham before the spring thaw set in, and he was going on from there this summer. Parties are going over his trail from here all the time now."

"Sufferin' coyotes!" exclaimed Flapjack. "If we started right after him do you figure we could get to Dawson by fall?"

"Oh, I should hardly say that. Inspector Moodie thought it was nearly a thousand miles from here to Pelly Banks where he was to strike the Yukon. You will have his trail to follow, but after all it is only a trail, and your horses must rest sometimes. No, you had better go with supplies for two summers on the way."

"I expect you're right," admitted Packsaddle reluctantly, "and that means I'm still interested in a job of work. Can I do any freightin' for you? There's a party of six of us will need a year's food."

Mr. Gunn considered.

"I could use a pack-train myself after the boats come in, to forward supplies to the head of the Canyon portage beyond Hudson's Hope. Meanwhile if any of these Klondikers have anything to transport and want help in transporting it, I'll keep you in mind. Where have you put your horses? I'll send an Indian to show you a place beyond the timber where they can feed and find water, but have no temptation to stray."

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The factor was as good as his word, and the horsewranglers moved their camp to the edge of a meadow near the bend of the river, with hills towering a thousand feet in the air to pen in the horses. Across the rushing river the southern bank spread a long low foreground at the base of wooded hills that rose in steps. Behind their camp a valley cut a deep notch filled with trees back into the high country, and to the left of this ravine they could see the Company trail, following along a hogback ridge and dodging out of sight behind a conical mass of amethyst earth crowned with a streak of ivory, near the summit of the climb.

For two weeks the horsewranglers busied themselves with odd jobs. Andy Bell discovered a small and moderately lucrative business in hauling supplies for the Klondikers who were taking the overland trail, up the thousand foot slope from the water to the top of the river's majestic shore. The others opened and restuffed all the pads with grass from the meadow, and looked over pack-saddles and ropes, to have everything in readiness for the miles ahead. Then one evening as Packsaddle and Andy were preparing their evening meal they heard steps on the trail from the fort. Pebbles rolled and bounded down the cut-bank to the gravel beach below at the place where the path skirted the edge, and presently two men appeared. The horsewranglers stared and then rose with a shout of welcome.

"Howdy! Good Hope! Where's the rest of your party?"

The four gripped hands heartily.

"They went overland this spring from Dunvegan, leaving Tait and me to bring in some extra supplies we ordered sent here from Edmonton," said one.

"We saw your partners at Dunvegan," added Tait, "and they thought we might be able to persuade you fellows to pack them in for us, if you weren't already hired by some one else."

"Saw Kansas and Slim, did you? How were the old horse thieves, anyway?"

"They were making good speed all right."

Packsaddle nodded his satisfaction.

"They won't waste no time," he said. "About that job of

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freightin'. We ain't hired, but we ain't outfitted for it neither. The factor here says we oughta take grub for a year more, and there's six of us. He can give us some work freightin' Company stuff up to a place above here where they put it on boats again, but it might take us several trips to earn our outfit. You can't wait on that."

The man Tait shook his head.

"We can't wait on anything after the stuff gets here, for we have to meet the party on a river beyond Fort Graham by August first. If you're willing to freight for us, we will outfit you—that is, providing you agree to take your pay that way."

Packsaddle thought a moment before he spoke again.

"How is the stuff comin' in?"

"We bought it through the Company. We hope it will be on these first boats."

"Andy," said Packsaddle, "ask Flapjack and the Preacher to step over here, will you? These is my other pardners," he continued when the enlarged circle was complete. "Mr. Peterson you've saw before and this here is Mr. Shirley. This is Mr. Tait, boys, of the Good Hope Party, and Mr.—"

"Conrad is my name," said the second Good Hope man.

"These men is offerin' us grub enough for a year, all six of us, if we will freight some supplies to a river beyond Fort Graham. I don't know just how far it is—"

"Between three and four hundred miles they tell me here at the fort," volunteered Tait.

"But it's on our way," Packsaddle went on. "I didn't want to close no bargain till you spoke your minds, seein' as we're all pardners."

"Why!" began Shirley, "I didn't—" and stopped with a grunt as Flapjack trod heavily on his foot.

"Sounds like a fair offer to me, pardner," said Flapjack with a grave face. "What you say, Preacher?"

The Preacher still speechless from the pain in his foot nodded his assent, and Flapjack continued in a matter-of-fact tone.

"They know the Preacher has his family?"

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"I told 'em grub for six," said Packsaddle, "and that's what they're figurin' on."

"That's all right with us then," announced Flapjack.

"Same here," supplemented Andy Bell in answer to an inquiring look.

With a brief discussion of details, settling that Packsaddle was to make up the order for supplies and that Tait was to take it to the clerk at the fort to insure its being filled from the first boatload of Company goods, the transaction was consummated, and in a few moments the Good Hope men departed. The four by the fire waited until the rattling of stones on the path had ceased, then Packsaddle reached out and shook Shirley's hand.

"I hated like hell to jump it on you that-away, Preacher, but it looked like too good a chance to miss. Grub for a year and all. I was afraid they mighta shied at the proposition if they didn't think we was all pardners, and it was a case of 'take one, take all.' "

"But—" began Shirley.

"They ain't no 'buts' about it. We need you and Miss Anne to help wrangle the pack-train, so get back to camp and tell her she's hired."

The Preacher looked from one to the other, and they shifted uneasily under his gaze, embarrassed as if they had been caught stealing sheep. He smiled.

"Good night—partners," he said, and his voice was husky.

The next day Packsaddle went up to the fort to see if it were possible to send a message to Dad Wilkinson and Billy in case they should care to join the party, but the travel of the white men was all up-river, and the best he could do was to entrust a note to a party of Indians who promised to deliver it, if they should happen to encounter the Dutch prospector or the Montana men on the river. With this, precarious though it was, they must rest content.

During the weeks that remained before the boats arrived from the Landing, Mrs. Shirley and Anne made new pads while the men constructed extra packsaddles, watching with a certain complacency the passing Klondikers, knowing they would soon be on the way themselves. Then one morning about the middle of June they

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saw a procession of York boats coming up the stream, each with its Indian crew bending to the towline laid across their shoulders. They did not need the fluttering pennant with its H. B. C. on the leading boat to tell them that the Company freight was coming in. They all swarmed down to the landing where Mr. Gunn and his helpers were with difficulty keeping order. But Dad and Billy Wilkinson were not among the men perched on the unwieldy loads.

"Them Indians couldn't find them, I guess," said Andy Bell in a disappointed tone.

"And we can't wait for 'em," observed Packsaddle. "We must be steppin' outa this now. Too bad! We coulda used them two."

A couple of days later the Klondikers' pack-train wound up the steep trail to the rim of the gigantic river valley. Packsaddle on his mare was in the lead, followed by his six mules who pressed forward with great ears pricked to see what lay beyond the summit. Behind them came forty horses under pack, fifteen of them new to the work and regarding their bulging burdens skittishly. Spaced along the line rode the horsewranglers, the Shirleys and the Good Hope men. The horses felt the month of rest and good pasture, and walked briskly up the grade with nodding heads and springy step, while the extra saddle horses trailing alongside pranced and gamboled foolishly, taking short cuts of their own across the hair-pin turns of the path, and appearing now behind, and now in front of the slower moving train.

"I sure wish they'd save up some of that energy," grumbled Flapjack. "They'll need it all before they get where they're goin'."

Or the high table-land the trail led across a prairie to the shadows of trees and through the trees back to prairie-land again. Rocky ridges were climbed and passed, and against the sky the snowpeaks beckoned.

"Do you suppose," asked Anne Shirley breathlessly, "that they are the Continental Divide?"

Packsaddle smiled indulgently.

"They're the Rockies anyway, Miss Anne, you can safely bet your last dollar on that."

Shortly after noon Packsaddle called a halt in a grassy valley

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where the horses were knee-deep in young green hay. Packs were thrown down and the horses turned loose to roll and grunt and rise again to feed. Klondiker parties passed at a rapid pace and stared in amazement at the resting men and horses.

"Never mind, brothers," said Flapjack under his breath. "We'll pass you all yet, you'll see."

Mrs. Shirley and Anne had hurried forward when the camp equipment was flung to the ground to claim the duty of cooks, and to Packsaddle's protest the girl cocked a saucy eye.

"You said we were hired," she reminded him. "And we understand the cook never stands night-guard. We both like our sleep, so we are cooks. Trot away now and tend your horses and mules."

"That means you too, Flapjack," said Mrs. Shirley to the tall young cowpuncher who had brought her an armload of firewood. "We'll—how do you say it?—rustle our own wood from now on."

After the meal Packsaddle outlined his routine.

"I've been freightin' more years than some of you have lived," he began, "and I know there's just one way to get them horses and mules over this trail in any kinda shape. We got near four hundred miles to go in four weeks. We got to make time and yet there's mountains to cross and I expect damn little trail to follow once we turn off this river-road. We're goin' to make one drive a day. We'll start at what in God's country would be daylight, say, four o'clock, and knock off at noon, and we'll guard the horses, two men a night, turn about, so each pair of riders gets two unbroken nights outa three, and the horses gets a chance to look for their grub. Them fool Klondikers may be jeerin' at us now, but when we get in the mountains we'll leave 'em all behind. Mrs. Shirley, you and Miss Anne say you're cooks, so I'm takin' you at your word." They nodded at him eagerly. "You better roll out at three, and kick the rest of us out at three-thirty. And now you others that ain't guardin' the horses can do what looks good to you. I'm turnin' in."

On the third day they reached the Halfway River, a crooked valley breaking into the Peace from the right. Here they turned north along the level top of the first terrace about three hundred feet above the water, following the windings of the tributary riv-

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er's course just beyond its bordering timber and well below the towering summit of the Breaks. The new trail was the old trapper's path to Fort Nelson with the blazes freshened by the patrol of Mounted Police, worn smooth with years of foot travel, seeking always the most even and firmest way. In the early hours of the mornings the pack-train passed sleeping parties of other Klondikers, but in the afternoons of rest these in turn overtook the horses. On this level road they merely held their place.

But if the trail was even, the floor of the valley was slowly rising, and when they reached the forks of the river a week out from Fort St. John, a short steep pitch brought them to the water's edge. The Fort Nelson trail continued up the stream, but the blaze of the Mounted Police indicated that the way to Fort Graham led over the east fork, and that there was no ford. Several parties were camped here building rafts. Packsaddle chose his place well upstream from the crossing of the trail, and that afternoon the men cut down nine pine trees and a number of saplings, which Packsaddle's mules snaked down to the river bank. Under his direction six trees were lashed together with the pack-ropes and three tied crosswise at the middle and both ends of the platform thus made. To these three supports a flooring of sapling poles was made fast, and the raft was ready. Each man was then told to provide himself with a long pole and a paddle, a task which kept them all busy until Anne called them to supper.

The mosquitoes and black flies swarming in the sheltered valley made inaction a torment and even though they spread their beds in the drifting smudge of their fires, the horsewranglers slept but little, and the usual early call came almost as a relief. The raft was pried and shoved down into the river and moored fast to the bank while the packs and camping equipment were placed upon it. Mrs. Shirley was assisted to a seat on top of the baggage and the girl climbed lightly to her side. With eyes shining with excitement they watched the men cast off the moorings and leap nimbly aboard the flimsy craft. Under the combined weight the raft sank until only the flooring was above the water, then at the impetus given by the shoving poles it moved out into the current. The water deep-

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ened and the current caught it just as the men shifted from the poles to their paddles.

It was now apparent why Packsaddle had chosen a point so far upstream, for the six men paddling with all their strength could not drive the heavy raft ahead as fast as it was moving sidewise. But foot by foot they gained on the river until a shore eddy suddenly caught them and spun them like a top and flung them out toward shore.

"Jump!" yelled Packsaddle to the men forward. "Jump and hold her!"

Tait, Andy and Flapjack leaped into the shallow water and seized the raft while the others leaning on their poles forced it in toward shore. Presently the grip of the eddy relaxed and they floated in the quiet shallows.

"Now," said Packsaddle, "we'll unload and take this raft apart again. We need them ropes. And, Flapjack, while we make up the packs, you and Andy take your paddles and two of them trees. Work upstream till you think you could cross to our camp and then go over and get the horses. If one of you rides that mare of mine, the mules will follow her and start the herd into the water for you."

By the time the other Klondikers were beginning to stir about their cooking fires, the range horses were swimming the river with the mare and her faithful mules at their head. And that afternoon not many of the parties left behind overtook the train.

The trail was narrower now but still bore evidences of having been used before Moodie's patrol had passed along. It crossed to the bank of the west fork of the Halfway and followed the stream. For a week the pack-train made its way up this valley, keeping to the north bank until Saskatchewan Creek came in on the third day. The Rockies were in sight again, and the hills drew up to the water's edge on the north side of the river, three hundred feet high and densely wooded, forcing the trail across an easy ford. If it had not been for the clouds of flies the journey would have been an unalloyed joy to the girl and her mother, following the river flat in the cool of the mornings through sparse groves of pine and

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poplar, fishing in the creek with Flapjack through the long afternoons, sleeping at night within sound of its rushing water. The horses, kept in good trim by the half days of rest, worked willingly and well, and the train was beginning to move ahead of other parties who commenced to show the strain of the grade, which though easy was unbroken.

At the junction with Cypress Creek two weeks out from St. John's they left the river to follow the smaller stream with its bars and little islands. The creek was very crooked and on the third day, where it branched, the trail crossed to the south fork coming down from the west. The Klondikers traveled mostly along a path dappled with the light and shade of wide-set trees, but for one whole day they crossed the scar of an old forest fire, where the fallen trees had rotted until they turned to black powder at a touch. A week's journey beyond the mouth of Cypress Creek, the trapper's trail they had been following ended and the first cutting by Moodie's patrol began. The way was rough but easy to find, marked as it was by the bristling stumps and the prone trees lying beside it with brown needles still clinging to their twigs. They were climbing steadily now, and morning and evening showers swept through the Pass, drenching them with a cold drizzle. High mountains closed in on the valley, their tops rocky, their sides lightly clothed with trees, and on the higher reaches Packsaddle pointed out light moving specks that he said were mountain sheep. By their spring one noon Anne found the clear-cut print of a caribou's hoofs. He had stood to drink and had then moved away.

"We won't get to see no game," observed Flapjack, to whom she reported these tracks, "as long as we're traveling with these horses. They make too much noise. But there's sure lots of it around."

Four days of climbing up this narrow valley brought them to the summit of Laurier Pass, a fine large meadow twelve miles long surrounded by rugged hills where the skeletons of trees stood black above the green of berry bushes. By the side of a large spring from which a brook flowed noisily to issue between rocks to the southwest they made their camp, and Packsaddle called for a rest of two days to put the horses in the best of shape for the descent.

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Anne woke early on the morning of their second day on the summit and lifting the wall of the tent peered out at the inevitable shrouding mist. It was taking on pearly lights and drifting slowly over the meadow. Near at hand the two tents of the men showed grimy against the translucent veil, beyond were dark shapes she knew were horses. A tiny icy stream trickled down her hand and arm from the canvas she was holding. With a shiver she dropped the curtain and snuggled luxuriously deeper into her warm blankets. Presently a stir on the other side of the tent told her that her mother was awake. Lazily she watched the rippling of the calico strip that shut off her parents' half of the tent at night. It was such fun to know she did not have to hurry. She yawned delicately and then sat up to stretch with evident pleasure in the slow flexing of her muscles. As she reached for her clothes tucked away from the moisture under the tarpaulin cover at the foot of her bed a tiny smile curved the corners of her mouth. She was wondering whether Andy or Flapjack would get the water and start the fire. She had overheard a dispute about it yesterday.

But when she parted the tent-flaps and stepped outside she saw the glow of the fire by their stone fireplace, a filled bucket standing ready at hand, and both young men sitting on a log, surveying the scene with pride.

"Aren't you two up rather early?" she asked solicitously. "Couldn't you sleep well?"

They grinned at her.

"Ain't you a-goin' to thank us, lady," countered Andy Bell, "for doin' your mornin' chores?"

She shook her head.

"I'm speechless with surprise," she said. "But Mother will be awfully grateful. She's getting breakfast this morning, you know. She had her holiday yesterday, so this is mine."

With a mocking wave of her hand, she passed by the fire, and walked rapidly away into the mist beyond the horsewranglers' tent. The two men on the log gazed at each other for sympathy.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Andy Bell.

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"Worse than that," returned Flapjack, savagely. "I'd like to shake her."

But they stayed to help Mrs. Shirley get breakfast, and ate the meal in a lofty silence that Anne noted with wicked satisfaction. She made no effort to get them to speak, confining her conversation to Packsaddle and the two Good Hope men. She apparently did not notice when they rose and left the fire, and when the mist lifted to reveal a perfect summer day, when the morning tasks were done, she took the pile of garments they all had washed the day before, and finding a sunny rock on the hillside where the wind swept the air free of mosquitoes, she bent to the mending, seemingly content to be alone.

Several hours later they found her there and dropped to a seat, one on either side of her. She smiled a welcome, but she let them be the first to speak. Flapjack scanned the neat piles of clean clothes that she had laid out on the rock, casually, then his eyes fixed on one.

"Why, Miss Anne!" he exclaimed. "Are those—"

"Yes, they're yours. And the pile next, Andy, belongs to you. I really was grateful for the fire this morning and the water too, you see. There isn't a hole left."

"There were a hell of a lot in mine," said Flapjack ruefully.

"Young man, you don't exaggerate one bit," she told him.

"Say, lady," Andy's face was solemn, "I hope you noticed the proper way to darn a sock."

"I did indeed," she retorted. "Run a gathering around the hole, draw it into a bunch and fasten it with a hard knot."

"Have you nearly finished that job?"

"Almost. Why?"

"Flapjack and I have found somethin' we think you'd like to see. That is, if you feel strong enough for a walk this afternoon."

"I'm with you," said the girl joyously.

They set off down the meadow after the dinner work was done, following the meandering of the little creek. The horses in the deep grass stood at gaze to watch them go and one of Packsaddle's mules followed them a little way, stepping delicately and stopping when

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they stopped to look at some queer bugs with long slender legs that scuttled about on the bottom of a shallow pool. The mule regarded the underwater phenomenon fixedly, then shifted his lustrous gaze to his human companions. Suddenly he deafened them by an ear-splitting bray and with a skittish kick was off to join his teammates. At this they all laughed.

"He sure was amused," declared Flapjack.

On the hillside above the pool they came on raspberry bushes bent over with the weight of their fruit.

"I just can't believe they're so big," marveled Anne.

They ate until they could hold no more and then Anne lined Andy's hat with leaves, and they picked the crown full to take back to camp. They carried the hat down and set it on a flat rock by the stream.

"We'll get it when we come back," explained Flapjack, as he led the way on down the meadow. The brook was moving faster now, drawing near to the rocky barrier. They could see where it dived out of sight between the boulders. With Flapjack in the lead they edged their way through this gateway with the stream. The passage was about twenty feet long and not more than five feet wide. It opened out to a grassy room, walled with tumbled rocks, that sheltered a grove of pines. Three white birches gleaming against the shadows leaned across the little creek.

"Boys!" breathed Anne. "How lovely!"

"Wait, lady," said Andy. "You ain't seen half of it yet."

Flapjack was still leading down the stream. He came now to where the brook once more passed through a gateway of rock, this time about ten feet wide. He turned aside here and climbing around and to the top of the rocky barrier a little to the south of where the creek broke through, he found a level place and reached down a helping hand for Anne. The girl scrambled to his side and Andy followed.

To one side and below, the brook fell sheer for forty feet, a lace-like streamer of white that stirred in the wind. Beneath was a shadowy pool sixty feet across, black in its clear depth, white where the waterfall churned it to foam. Aspens with ferns at their feet

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crowded to its brink as if to look in, and behind them the cliff on which the three were sitting curved about it, sinking gradually toward the west to let the stream go through to a wide, sunlit ravine. Anne was silent with clasped hands. Now and again she looked at the boys and smiled. With a queer tightening in his throat Flapjack returned her smile. It was like her, he thought, not to talk. Reluctantly at last they climbed down from their perch and crossing the upper antechamber they pushed through the passage to the meadow.

"Pretty tidy, wasn't it?" Andy spoke exultantly, his eyes on Anne.

"Yes," said the girl absently. She was watching the color deepen on the eastern mountains, too deeply stirred for speech. The silent mood lasted through the evening, but the raspberries furnished the others with material for talk, and she could hug her memory undisturbed. Once or twice she caught Flapjack's eyes upon her, and secretly they smiled.

The horsewranglers had crossed the Rockies, but the Wolverine Range still separated them from Fort Graham on the Finlay River, and the country between was a jumble of mountains which gave them eight days of rough going. They left the summit meadow at the southwest, joining the creek below what the men called "Anne's Waterfall" and following it until another creek from the northwest came in to form the Ospica River. The trail left the river here, turning west for forty miles across the mountains to avoid a long bend to the north. A little way beyond this turn they came to a place where Moodie's patrol had evidently gone astray. Several felled trees lay across a trail that they had plainly taken to the west, and a rude sign indicated a sharp turn to the right as the nearest way to Fort Graham.

The horses found this new country little to their liking and that night the guard had to rouse all the men to turn them back from a determined attempt to go home. They had covered twelve miles of the back trail before they were overtaken, and Anne and Mrs. Shirley held camp alone for almost a day before the men succeeded in herding them back. Without their packs they could dodge and

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twist among the trees, and the Buckskin Devil was suffering a relapse to his old wild ways. Again and again he led a bunch away from the trail, sent them circling back, set the riders pounding after them and then dodged aside to watch the chase sweep by. Each time when his maneuver was complete he trotted back to the waiting herd with a look of sardonic satisfaction on his knowing face. The men swore at him, but could not resist laughter even as they swore. Thanks to his machinations, however, a day was lost.

The way led up dry canyons, over bald shoulders, through valleys of grass dotted with pine. Sometimes it followed a stream for a short way before climbing another ridge. It crossed the Ospica again, grown now to a width of nearly two hundred yards, but still capable of being forded. And then it plunged into a pass through the Wolverine Mountains, seven miles of steep rise, then a gentle descent to a shallow basin on the summit where two small lakes and a nest of mudholes held the train up for another day. The horses had to be led along the steep northern shores of the lakes lest they lose their balance under their heavy packs, and brush must be cut and laid down to keep them from sinking in the swamp. The trail followed a creek down from this summit, keeping to the north side and climbing out on the bench when the valley of the Finlay was reached. There was one more creek to ford and a dry gully to negotiate before they came down to the river flat on the morning of the eighth day and crossed the three miles of level to Fort Graham.

"I'd like to stop here a coupla days to give the horses a rest," remarked Packsaddle as the buildings of the fort came in sight. "But that Buckskin Devil has took up so much of our time, that I expect we'd better do some inquirin' at the post before we make plans. Tait, you can remember the ungodly name of that river your pardners was aimin' for. Suppose you amble ahead and find out where it is and how long it will take us to get there. And you might ask 'em where they want us to camp."

Tait spurred his horse and galloped up the trail. Fort Graham was not extensive. There were two log buildings facing on a curve of the trail, neither more than twenty-five feet long, one square, the other with a small lean-to at the back, and a fenced enclosure

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behind solid palings that might be a garden, a paddock for horses or a pen for dogs. That was all. The usual village of Indian huts was a little way distant on the river bank, and several clusters of white tents seemed to indicate that other Klondikers were already encamped. Packsaddle and his companions stared at these tents in amazement, for it had been over a week since they had passed the last parties on their trail, and they naturally supposed they would be the first to reach Fort Graham.

A group of men were standing near the door of the larger of the two log buildings, and as Packsaddle rode up, Tait appeared with Mr. Fox, the Company clerk. The Hudson's Bay man looked with interest at the shaggy range horses.

"I've been telling your friend," he began, "that the Ingenica River is not more than two days' travel from here, so that you will have plenty of time to rest your horses three or four days and still get to your rendezvous before the first of August. There is a fine place to take them five or six miles south of here. Splendid hay and everything. Only you won't want to camp there yourselves for the flies are dreadful. Bulldogs, you know, and black flies too. You'd better plan to camp here and ride down to look to them once a day if you feel you must. They'll be all right there, I'm sure."

"I don't exactly like to put my horses where they'll suffer from flies," demurred Packsaddle. "Ain't there room for 'em here? I'm only stayin' two days."

"There's room enough if it wasn't for the quick—"

A sharp yell from Flapjack broke in upon them. They saw him spurring his horse behind the warehouse and uncoiling his lariat from his saddle as he went. Conrad and Shirley were following. As Packsaddle wheeled to see what was the matter, he heard Mr. Fox shouting to the men at the door of the store.

"Quick, men! Bring some ropes from inside the warehouse."

As the old freighter turned the corner of the warehouse and took in the scene, he saw at once that three of the horses were in quicksand.

"Keep the rest of them critters back, Miss Anne," he called to the girl who was riding forward. "Conrad, you're the lightest.

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Fasten the end of my lariat here around your waist, without a slip-knot, mind! Take this knife and cut the packs off them horses and be damn quick about it. If you feel yourself sinkin' take hold of the rope and yell. I'll yank you out all right."

Conrad obediently ran forward and loosened the pack from the nearest horse, sinking to his knees as he did so. As soon as a jerk from the lariat freed his legs, he floundered on to the next animal. Meanwhile Andy Bell and Flapjack had fastened a rope on the first horse which was struggling to rise now that he was unencumbered by the pack. Eager hands laid hold of the rope and with the assistance of the steady pull from eight men he dragged himself loose and leaped to solid ground, to stand there trembling. The second came more easily, but the third could not be dislodged until the mules were hitched to the rope. When all three horses and their packs were once more safe, Packsaddle wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Gentlemen," he said earnestly, "I'd like to stand drinks for the crowd, but the last post we was at didn't have nothin' stronger than tea. How about it, Mr. Fox?"

The Hudson's Bay man grinned and shook his head.

"I'm no better provided here. We can't stock liquor, you know."

"Well, I got one suggestion to make. I got a round-up cook in my outfit that can sling the best flapjack any of you ever complimented your mouths with, and if you'll all drop over to our camp to-night we'll set 'em up as long as you can eat. That all right with you, Flapjack?"

"You bet!" replied the boy. "Bring your own plates, though, boys. We're short on crockery."

Packsaddle now turned to Mr. Fox.

"There ain't no need, sir, to finish that sentence you begun. I agree that this place ain't right down adapted for horses. 'Pears as though their chances is better with flies than with quicksand."

"Perhaps you'd want to grease them," suggested Mr. Fox. "The Police made a mixture of grease melted soft, which they rubbed on their horses and it gave them noticeable relief. I have a quantity of

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spoiled lard that I can let you have, and the kettle Inspector Moodie used is still about somewhere."

"You say it worked?" queried Tait.

"Where is that spoiled lard?" demanded Packsaddle.

"Andy and me'll get up the fire," announced Flapjack.

The others scattered at once for wood and in short order a villainous black kettle was sending up an evil-smelling steam.

"God! It oughta work!" was Packsaddle's comment.

They found that a few minutes of boiling was all the cooks could stand. The kettle was lifted off the fire and Mrs. Shirley and Anne working with their handkerchiefs held to their noses, ladled the grease into tin plates to cool. The horses were brought in six at a time, relieved of their packs, and thoroughly greased, each man taking a horse, and smearing the warm mixture on face and legs, and belly. The animals seemed to understand the proceeding was for their relief, or perhaps the concoction was soothing to their already tortured skins, for even the Buckskin Devil submitted to the anointing without demur. Before the sun set the sixty sticky creatures had been driven to their pasture, and the horsewranglers had the satisfaction of seeing them browsing undisturbed while the mosquitoes swarmed, impotent, in clouds above their heads.

As they rode back to the fort the men suddenly realized that in their absorption with the horses they had eaten nothing since early morning, yet when they reached their camp they found their assistants of the quicksand already lined up, sitting in a long row on an improvised seat of logs, plates in hand.

"Lord Harry!" ejaculated Packsaddle softly. "Them flapjacks!"

But Mrs. Shirley had control of the situation.

"These gentlemen are just waiting till you've had your supper, boys. Flapjack, I didn't dare mix your batter, but everything is ready for you when you've eaten. Anne and I made syrup. It's pretty watery, but it's good and sweet, for we used some of those pills of yours, Packsaddle."

It was a scene Anne never forgot. The circle of dark trees, the dim gray shapes of tents in the background, the red light of the fire bringing out the weatherbeaten faces of the Klondikers, laugh-

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ing and fascinated, watching the skilled movements of the round-up cook pouring his batter into the smoking pan, squatting on his heels to hold the pan over the coals, flipping the pancake into the air, catching it squarely for a moment more of cooking, then flipping it again, golden brown and fragrant, to the waiting plate. Another and another. Around the circle and back again, until the last man cried "Enough." Then Flapjack stepped back and wiped his streaming face with the end of his neckcloth.

"Stranger!" said a sallow, long-visaged Klondiker with a great hooked nose, "we ain't yeared whether you have any other name, but we sho can state that y'all couldn't have no *better* one than Flapjack, nohow."

The Klondikers sat for a while about the fire. There was much to talk about, for these men had come in from the Pacific coast, up through the Fraser River country or in from Hazelton on the Skeena River up that stream and over the Divide to the Omenica, on the old mining trails; and they were eager to compare notes with the Peace River party. They thought it sounded like an easy route and the horsewranglers boasted mendaciously that it was fit for carts right now.

Fox, the Hudson's Bay man, told them of the work being done for them by the Police patrol. Not only were they making the trail about a week ahead of these parties, but Inspector Moodie had held a council while at Fort Graham with the leaders of the Finlay Indians.

"They're miserable, half-starved creatures," went on Fox, "and the chiefs had come in begging that they might exact a toll from you prospectors who might pass up the valley. The inspector made them understand you white men had a right to go anywhere in this country, to hunt, trap, fish, or to dig for gold, so long as you did not actually interfere with their little holdings. He said the Queen would help them if they behaved themselves and made no trouble for you. So you ought not to have any fuss. But be careful not to break up any of their snares or fishing-nets as you go along. They are naturally very vindictive, these Indians, and they're absolutely dependent from November to March on the little food they can

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collect and dry for their caches during the summer. I know you fellows would not willfully injure them. But if you don't think about it you might carelessly destroy what may be the means of life."

Two days later the pack-train left the post, still sticky and smelling to high heaven. The trail led along the flats for fourteen miles. A short way out of Fort Graham they came to a narrow deep creek spanned by a little bridge. The structure looked shaky and Packsaddle gave directions to cross slowly; but when about half the train were over, it suddenly collapsed, throwing several of the horses into the stream and impaling one on a broken support. The wounded beast screamed in terror and pain, and then with a frantic effort tore herself free and jerked feebly up the wreckage to the bank; but she was so badly hurt that she had to be shot.

The men were delayed a number of hours getting the rest of the frightened horses down into the creek and up on the other side. The necessity of work possessed them and they could not think until they were once more jogging along the trail.

"You bet I ain't goin' on no more of them old bridges," mourned Packsaddle. "That's the first horse we've lost since we got 'em outa the cars at Edmonton."

Depression claimed them all and could not be shaken off until the following day when excitement usurped their attention, for, if the factor was right, they must be nearing the rendezvous of the Good Hope Party on the Ingenica. Tait and Conrad, by common consent, were given the lead and so were the first to see the fair-sized camp on the incoming river.

"Hi! Good Hope!" yelled Tait.

Men appeared from tents as if by magic. Hats were waved, and the answering shouts were a chorus. The meeting in the wilderness was an accomplished fact.



Chapter XIII

A LOVE AFFAIR BECOMES TANGLED

THE next morning rain beat down pitilessly on the shivering group round the horsewranglers' fire. The tents of the Good Hope Party were still silent. They had no need to be stirring early as they must wait for the return of one of their prospecting parties from up the Ingenica before they could take the road. So the horsewranglers moved quietly and spoke in hushed voices.

"We couldn't expect the fine weather to last indefinitely," said Mr. Shirley, "but really we could do without this rain."

"If only they ain't no big rivers ahead for us to ford," remarked Packsaddle anxiously. "I've sure lost my confidence in the bridges of this country. Here's hopin' it lets up."

But for two days the rain continued, now increasing to a lashing shower, now slacking off in a fine mist, yet never ceasing altogether. They found the Posaca River sixty feet wide, but the ford had a good bottom, and although the river was fast they crossed it without mishap. Hour after hour, the horses and mules jogged along dispiritedly, the men and women shivered miserably, with

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always the dim shapes of the Wolverines on their right disappearing into the low-hanging clouds, always the gray surface of the river, dull and oily in the half-light, or scourged to vapor by the silver whips of showers.

Fifty-seven miles from Fort Graham the river branched. To their surprise the men found that the trail followed the right fork, still leading north, for they expected it to begin to veer toward the west. Now and again they met discouraged parties of Klondikers turning back, because they were running short of provisions, and from these they heard tidings of the Mounted patrol ahead.

"This trail ends above here a ways and the Police are chopping," one informant told them. "The man in charge says it's a thousand miles to Dawson yet, and probably there ain't no road. God! I've had enough."

"Are them Police figurin' on choppin' a thousand miles of trail?" Packsaddle's amazement was tinged with incredulity.

"Fools, ain't they?" remarked the discouraged one.

"Well, no," demurred Andy Bell, "that ain't exactly the name I'd apply. For I have an idea if they set out to chop a thousand miles, they'd just about do it. But the Yukon River takes up quite a piece of that distance."

"Even if rivers took up half of it," Flapjack put in, "five hundred miles is no slouch of a choppin' job."

To this they all agreed.

The sun had come out when they reached the Acqui-ica, but they drew up in consternation on the bench above its valley. Through the flat deposit of ages at the junction of the stream the incoming river made its way in three dirty turbulent channels, obviously swollen with the rain. Grass on the islands between them promised good footing there, but the drowned look of the drift-piles on the bars and the disappearance of the usual gravelly margins showed that the fords would be deep. Slowly, cautiously Packsaddle led the way on his mare. The flat between the bench and the first channel was largely slough, where the freighter's mare sank halfway to her knees, but beneath the surface mud she evidently found firm ground, for though she snorted in protest, she yet

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moved forward timidly and so gained the higher ground by the water. With sucking footsteps the mules followed and the train came after them.

The first channel was nearly a hundred yards wide. The water was very fast, but a gravel bar extended diagonally across the stream and the far bank looked firm. Again Packsaddle's mare took the lead, obeying her master's voice and rein, but scanning the turbid river nonetheless with anxious eyes. The water clutched and tore at her legs. Once she stumbled and had to be steadied by the rein, after which she moved even more deliberately; but by slow degrees she reached and passed the middle of the channel and then with quickened pace splashed on to the island. The train followed with somewhat less deliberation and she watched them with a troubled gaze. Perhaps she felt vindicated when two of the trailing horses carelessly missed their footing and were swept downstream. Luckily they were nearly across and by swimming strongly secured a foothold at the very end of the island by which they managed to scramble out.

The second channel was swift and deep but by good fortune it was also narrow and when the packs were divided so two horses carried the usual load of one the entire train were able to swim it. They were now on an island about three hundred yards wide with the main stream of the river between them and the shore. One glance was enough to show the ford was too deep for safe passage and the piles of half-submerged driftwood below the bar made swimming too dangerous a feat for the horses. The island was covered with grass and scrub-growth, none of which was large enough to furnish the material for a raft.

"Well, boys," said Packsaddle when all this had been ascertained, "here's where we go into camp until this here flood goes down. If any of them packs got wet, we're likely to have a fine chance to dry 'em."

With what patience they could they waited for the water to subside. The men cut grass while the packs dried, and restuffed the pads which Anne and her mother had ripped open and emptied and now sewed up again. The weather was hot and in the breathless

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air of the sheltered river valley, flies and mosquitoes gathered in vindictive swarms. Mr. Shirley strung a tarpaulin between willows for a shade over the spot at the island's upper end which his daughter had dubbed "the sewing room," and Flapjack built a smudge fire of wet driftwood. This last Anne regarded with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm.

"If the smoke is thick enough to keep off the flies," she explained as she pulled a squeaking needle through the stubborn canvas, "it makes me cry so I can't see to sew."

"There's gratitude for you," declared the young cowpuncher, "when it took me nearly an hour to get that wet wood burnin'." His tone was mournful and they all laughed.

Through two long summer days they worked and waited, gathered together in the shade of the tarpaulin, looking up from their task now and then to watch the black bears hunting berries among the bushes growing in the scar of an old forest fire on the high sloping river bank opposite. Toward evening the big animals came down to the water's edge to drink, and if they heard voices one would rear up and survey the humans on the island, furry ears cocked, big front paws hanging slack over the soft rounded paunch. The first time she saw this Anne laughed with delight, and at the sound the creatures turned to make off up the graveled incline in an awkward run apparently slow but actually incredibly swift.

"It's quittin' time," observed Packsaddle on the second day, "when the bears come down to drink."

"And here's the last pad done," said Mrs. Shirley, biting off a thread with decision.

Andy Bell rose and examined a stake he had set in the water just below their bank.

"River's fallin' fast, boss," he reported.

Packsaddle nodded.

"After supper you and Flapjack take your horses and test the ford. I'm hopin' we can get over to-morrow."

"Oh! Can I go too?" cried the girl.

Packsaddle shook his head.

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"You can watch them from the bank all you've a mind to, Miss Anne. But we can't take no chances with you. We could pick up another man most anywhere on this trail, and we could spare a horse if we had to, but girls is scarce."

In the end they all went down to watch the two horsemen, bare-back on their ponies, picking their way out along the angling bar that was the ford. With arched necks and quivering nostrils the cow-ponies felt for each step, hesitating now and again, moving forward to the low-voiced encouragement of the men. They crossed to the main shore in safety and on their return the men reported the water still very swift at the deepest point where it reached half-way up the horses' bodies.

"But it's goin' down," said Andy Bell, "and by to-morrow even the pack animals could get over safely."

"The bottom's firm and it ain't too rocky," added Flapjack.

The two elder Shirleys and Packsaddle now turned back to the camp at the upper end of the island, but the three young people lingered on the bar. The mountain barrier beyond the Finlay River was turning to massed shadow of purple black against the last of the sunset glow, the river caught the light in silver at its feet. Along the crests of the Acqui-ica's banks daytime colors lingered still, a diaphanous memory, but above their heads the pallid disc of the moon was growing luminous.

"What a heavenly night!" breathed the girl.

Flapjack touched her arm and pointed to a drift log with a strange, contorted limb still curving from it, that had been stranded on the gravel.

"Looks made to set on," agreed Andy Bell. "Mosquitoes ain't bad to-night. Come on, lady."

Forthwith they seated the girl on the round bole with the limb at her back, then they set flat stones for stools and placed themselves at her feet. In voices unconsciously tuned to the cadence of the murmuring water they talked together, now of Kansas and Slim, and now of the trail ahead. The boys boasted of the fortunes they would make in the Klondike and the girl listened with a shade of amusement in her eyes. Dreams had played too cruel a part in

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the life of Shirley's daughter for her to overlook the possibility of a rude awakening even in the glamour of this quest for gold. But dreamers were dear to her and she said nothing to break the spell.

As night deepened about them and the moonlight grew to magical intensity the talk turned home. Andy told of the great Missouri winding through the plains of eastern Montana, of the dust and excitement of the round-up camps, and of the countless cattle on the 101 Ranch. Flapjack pictured the desert, colorful and dangerous under the summer sun, beckoning and mysterious at night; the green ranges and the forest of the high country with the snow-tipped Big Horns watching. And in return Anne spoke of Ohio with its lamplit farmhouses and the sweet hay fields asleep under just such a moon.

It was Flapjack who brought Anne to the tent where her mother and father were waiting. As the two lingered outside the murmur of their voices came through the canvas wall and something in the quality of the man's utterance made Mrs. Shirley lay down her mending. She could not catch the words but the tones reached her, low, vibrant, thrilling. Silently she rose and moved to where she could look out. Through the mosquito curtain that screened the opening the girl's figure showed an indistinct silhouette, but the moonlight fell full on the boy's face and there was that in his eyes that confirmed the mother's fears. Swiftly and still noiselessly she went back to where her husband was dozing on a camp-stool, his head resting on arms outspread on the table. With a hand on his shoulder she roused him.

"Henry! Henry!" Her whisper was agonized. "Flapjack is in love with Anne."

"What? . . . Nonsense!" The girl's laughter floated in to them, light, carefree. "Listen to that!"

Mrs. Shirley shook his shoulder lightly.

"I never said she was in love with him. But he—go and look at him now if you don't believe me."

"Well, if he is, I don't know what we can do about it. But don't worry, Mother. As long as Anne is not in love with him she can handle it."

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Mrs. Shirley sighed.

"I only hope she will," she said.

The next day Packsaddle gave the order to take up the march, the ponies splashed across the shallows and waded in safety through the now slackened main current to the north shore. A sharp incline brought them up to the level bench above the Finlay again where they settled down to the slow jog of the burdened pack-train. At intervals along the line the men slouched at ease in their saddles, with little to do save watch the nodding ears of their mounts. The range horses trailed expertly now, often walking along the path in single file for an hour at a time or stopping to browse where the lupin grew thickest and then clattering up to overtake the train, urged into motion by Flapjack Charlie who maintained a lazy rear-guard to prevent undue straggling. The cowpuncher was singing, and now and again the turns of the road brought broken strains of Slim Jackson's song to the ears of Mrs. Shirley who rode near the center of the caravan.

"Whoopee ti yi yo . . . wild horses!
. . . Klondike . . . your new home."

The song assured her of the whereabouts of the young round-up cook and she noted with satisfaction that her daughter was riding with Packsaddle in the lead.

Anne, too, was satisfied with her companion, for the old freighter had spent the morning in the leisurely spinning of yarns about a faint-hearted but big-mouthed mail-carrier on the old road from Fort Laramie into the Big Horn country.

"I was standin' with the boys outside the store when Bill rode into town. Covered with dust to his eyebrows, he was, but he didn't have no mail. Been set upon by Injuns, he said, about thirty miles south a town. He'd clumb a little butte that was there and stood 'em off for hours. Till his ammunition give out, he said. Then he rolled off the back of the butte into a kinda gulch and hid. And after a time the Injuns got tired lookin' for him and moved off. When he dared to crawl out he couldn't find his rifle nor the mail-

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pouch nowheres. Musta lost 'em rollin' down that butte. He'd cotched up his horse and come in to report the loss, he said.

"Well, them as was new to the country was plumb sympathetic with Bill; but me and two other fellows couldn't savvy how Bill could hide out so a Injun couldn't find him if he was lookin' for him good. Likewise, we suspicioned his horse bein' left where he could catch it, easy, like that. So we left them all a-bolsterin' up Bill's shattered nerves with good licker, and we rid out south a town. We found the butte all right, and the mail-pouch near where the trail went over it. But we didn't find no tracks of all them Injuns that had been circlin' it for hours while Bill popped at 'em."

"Had he made up the whole thing?" asked Anne.

"Well, he had something to start on, for we seen the trail of a big herd of cattle, and we picked up his rifle about half a mile away along the road to town. Looked like he'd heard them cattle and had just lit out without lookin'. Dropped the mail and dropped his gun. Needed both hands to hang onto his horse, I guess. Least-ways that was how we figured it out then, but we done Bill an injustice. He had fired one shot anyhow in his own defense. The Y.U. boys found a steer with a gunshot wound in his shoulder when they had their beef round-up that Fall. . . . Say, Miss Anne! Look at there!"

Packsaddle had reined in his mare and was pointing along the trail ahead. Down the aisle between the trees came a scarecrow of a brown and white spotted horse and on its back a man was clinging to the horn of his saddle as if almost too weak to keep his seat. Something, the pattern of the mackinaw that covered the bowed shoulders or the set of the visored cap, seemed familiar to the girl. Packsaddle was urging his horse forward.

"Graham! Jack Graham!" he called.

The oncoming rider raised his hand in recognition and salute. A ringing call from Packsaddle brought up the other riders, who swarmed about the trapper pressing him to dismount.

"It's noontime anyways," declared Packsaddle, "so we'll just camp right here. And of course you'll stop to eat with us. What's happened to you, Graham? You look starved."

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The trapper smiled wryly.

"I'm ashamed to tell you, boys, for there's no excuse for an old hand like me. I've had a touch of scurvy. But I'm all right now. I met this patrol of Policemen a few days ago and they gave me some potatoes, enough to last me to Fort Graham."

He swung himself slowly from his saddle and moved with a queer hesitating gait over to a log on which he sat.

"I'm a little weak yet," he explained apologetically.

All through the meal which followed the Americans regarded him with a pity they were careful to conceal. Out of consideration for the half-defiant shame in his eyes, they ignored the furrows in his sallow face under the stubble of beard and the loose folds of shirt and trousers held in by the shortened sash, to discuss in matter-of-fact tones this unexpected meeting.

"We thought you'd gone to Edmonton," said Andy Bell.

"I did. And then I hired out to guide a Klondike party that wanted to be put on the headwaters of the Turn Again River up at the top of the valley here."

"You didn't come through Fort St. John, did you?" Packsaddle spoke in a puzzled tone.

"No. We struck in back of Dunvegan, following the Good Hope Party. Hard road. If I'd knowed about the police I'd have taken their trail, sure. We got through, but we were precious short of food. Counted on hunting some, but the Klondikers have got all the game scared out of these hills. When I left my party up there I didn't think they could last out even to the Cassiar country. But the fools would go on. If they get this scurvy you'll probably come up with 'em stuck somewheres. That is, if they don't die before you reach 'em. I told the Police, too." He surveyed the well-filled plate that Mrs. Shirley had given him, his eyes moody. "You've got plenty of food, I hope."

"Enough for two years," Packsaddle assured him.

"That's not too much," he said. "You may need it all."

He questioned them about their own progress since he had seen them on the Peace River.

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"When I run on the Police I hoped you'd be behind them. You have a fair chance of getting through now. Only don't rush it!"

When he came to leave he would not accept the horse they wanted him to take in exchange for his worn-out steed.

"We aren't far from Fort Graham now, and there we can both rest up. I'm used to him and he's used to me, so we'd better stick it out together." And he waved his hat at them as he rode off around a bend in the trail.

For over a week the pack-train plodded up the valley of the Finlay and Mrs. Shirley watched with a growing anxiety the intimacy between Anne and Flapjack Charlie. On the second day after Graham had passed them they came to the end of the old trail they had been following and entered on the new cutting made by the Police patrol ahead. Here the stumps of the chopping and the uncertain footing claimed all the attention of the riders for the protection of their mounts and the trailing horses. There was little time for talking on the march, and at night they were all tired enough to seek their blankets when the routine camp work was done; but the long afternoons while the horses browsed and rested brought empty hours for every one. On the days when Anne was on duty as cook, Mrs. Shirley noticed that Andy and Flapjack were usually at hand to wipe the dishes, and she saw with dismay that they had taken to shaving every day. Mr. Shirley when this was pointed out to him admitted it might well be a serious sign.

"But as long as the two are willing to follow her around together, why should you think either of them is particularly in earnest? And why Flapjack and not Andy?"

"I don't know unless it's the tone of his voice when he talks to her alone."

"But he never makes love to her, does he?"

"No-o." Mrs. Shirley's voice was reluctant, and she qualified the denial by a cryptic "Not yet!" At her husband's shout of laughter she amplified the statement. "He's such a big, clean, upstanding boy, Henry, that I have an idea he'd be almost irresistible if he ever wakes up to what is the matter with him. I think the only

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way to save them both is to keep Anne from having many chances to be alone with him."

"Take care, my dear. Now you are on dangerous ground. If Anne ever got the idea that you . . ."

"As if I would let her know!"

Acting on this new decision and using the growing fatigue of the trail as her excuse, a plea to which the visible effects of her anxiety gave color, Mrs. Shirley now changed the division of their work so that neither she nor Anne ever worked alone, but both shared in each day's tasks. Free days were now a thing of the past and while the trail wound along the bench there was no reason for uneasiness. Mrs. Shirley was at leisure to watch the river three hundred feet below, and the Wolverines pressing closer in on the right, and beyond the Peak Mountains on the west dwindling and sinking into the valley, she could see the snow-capped Cassiar Range marching forward from its place against the northwest sky. Her girl was busy and seemed to have little thought as well as no time for the young horsewranglers.

But the times when they had to cross the river were a trial to Mrs. Shirley. The first crossing was some twenty odd miles out on the new Police trail where a bad canyon came in from the east, cutting off their way. The river was two hundred fifty yards broad, and too deep for fording. A whole day was spent in constructing a raft and another day in coaxing the range horses ten at a time down the fifty foot cut-bank and out on the suspicious craft. During these days Anne was almost continually with the men watching them at their raft-building, or riding on black Peanut at the rear of each bunch of horses as Flapjack and Andy mounted on the leaders guided them into the light pen aboard the raft. Placing her horse across the open end she effectively prevented the four-footed passengers from trying to jump overboard, while the men assisted by Packsaddle and her father poled and paddled the platform to the western shore. It was necessary work and suited to her strength, but Mrs. Shirley did wish it had not been part of it for her to ride back each time with the men on the empty raft.

The second crossing a few miles below the forks was to her mind

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even worse than the first. To be sure it was not necessary to build a raft, for they found a canoe which the Police had used and Flapjack recovered it by swimming Roman Nose across and paddling it back. But after the outfit had been crossed and the horses guided over, the day was at its close and the canoe was available for the evening. It was a chance the young people could not fail to take, and after supper Anne set out with Flapjack and Andy at the paddles. Mrs. Shirley stood at the tent door and watched them go.

"I know they're both with her, but I'm afraid of all this intimacy. I wish you could think of some kind way to stop it."

Mr. Shirley was filling his pipe. He paused now and looked after the little craft afloat in the glory of the sunset colors.

"Perhaps I don't want to stop it."

"Henry! Would you really like to see your daughter marry a round-up hand?"

"She might make a worse choice than Charlie Peterson, my dear. He's honorable and loyal. He would be kind to her and . . ."

"Oh, I know! But she has nothing in common with him. Except youth."

"Mother," Mr. Shirley spoke slowly, "hasn't it occurred to you that if we live to reach the Klondike Anne may have more in common with these men than with any others in the world?"

From that moment Mrs. Shirley gave up her husband as hopeless in this situation. She was convinced she would have to make whatever fight was made, alone.

Meanwhile Anne was quite unconscious of her mother's anxiety or of any need for such a feeling. She was reveling in the life of the trail, the start in the chill of early morning, the growing strength of the rising sun increasing to the hot, still noons, the long afternoons with the horses crunching and stamping about her, the cooking with long-handled pans and one arm crooked up to protect her face from the glow of the coals or the drifting wood smoke, and nights when she woke to the far, lonesome howl of a wolf and saw the grotesque tree-shadows cast by the moon along the canvas above her head. Then she snuggled down into her blankets with a shiver of delight that was almost ecstasy.

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For twenty, thirty miles they rode along the east branch of the Finlay, moving slowly to let the horses make the most of the fine feed, and sometimes Flapjack rode up alongside her to lay a gloved hand on her arm and point to some witchery of mist in the river valley or a vista where the near-by hills parted to show the rugged Cassiars with their streaks of snow. At such times she could not have told how much of her thrill was due to the beauty he indicated and what was a response to the silent comradeship of his act. But whatever part his understanding played in the joyous background of her days, her conscious thought was more given to the incidents of the trail than to him. The bowlder that turned under the mule's feet when they forded the east branch of the Finlay, throwing the beast on his back in deep water, the sight of Packsaddle rushing to his mule's assistance oblivious to the danger of the wildly thrashing heels, cutting loose the pack and dragging him half-drowned to the shallows of the ford; or that other morning when they found the sleek, shining body of the Buckskin Devil limp and lifeless near the spring, the mourning of the riders at this passing of their prince of rebels—"he must a ate some poison-weed, for nothing living could touch him"—these things occupied the foreground of her mind.

They crossed a hogback from the east branch into the valley of the Fox, that fork of the Finlay which came out of the north. There was muskeg between the hogback and the river, and hay meadows that looked so inviting from a distance were wet and soggy. High hummocks of dead grass as big as half a barrel with tufts of this year's growth feathering their tops made insecure footing for horses and mules and between them the muck was knee-deep. Mosquitoes and flies rose from the coarse grass in such swarms that the party had to halt, unpack the rancid lard and grease their tortured animals. Then on again, up and down over low ridges, past places where the river was rather a chain of lakes, on to the last lake of them all and the windy summit of the divide.

A post with a signboard left by the Police named it for them, "Sifton Pass." Packsaddle touched the lettering and then sniffed at his fingers.

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So saying he vanished in one direction after their scattered animals while Flapjack sped off in another. With fingers made clumsy by haste the Shirleys roped and knotted the tarpaulins around the cooking things. The first of the horses were crowding into the camping-place before their packs were ready, but the fire was moving faster even than the men who herded the horses in desperate fear. The glow beyond the ridge grew brighter. A gleaming tongue leaped up and caught a bush that stood on the crest, another and another.

"Saddle the ridin' horses," yelled Packsaddle as he entered the camp, but the command was never obeyed.

In a mounting wave the fire flung itself over the ridge. For an instant trees were outlined black against it before they became incandescent spears of flame. The heat of it scorched the watchers' faces, the crackling roar of it seemed to fill the world.

"The river!" Packsaddle's voice was hoarse. "And bring the horses if you can."

Turning as one they plunged down the slope to the river, driving the beasts before them in a headlong rush. How she got down Anne never knew. She remembered vaulting over a fallen tree. She had a confused impression of her father and Packsaddle lifting her mother over some obstacle, of some helping hand that she grasped and lost again, of horses in a wild panic flashing by, of some one holding her steady until they were gone again, of scrambling down a bank that gave under her feet. And then she was standing knee-deep in water with Flapjack by her side, his arms about her. Unconsciously she clung to the man, but her eyes were held fascinated by the fire.

The glare of the burning trees fell on their camping-place, casting dark shadows that doubled the size of the abandoned packs and saddles. She thought of those packs, the food, the blankets, the winter clothing. And ammunition too. Slowly she turned her head to the others. Her father was standing in the midst of the little group. His lips were moving silently. Was he praying? She saw the men, one by one, take off their hats. Her eyes went back to the fire. It was almost on the camp, the sparks and burning twigs blow-

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ing ahead of its advance to set new spots of flame. Suddenly the bending top of a blazing tree straightened and pointed skyward. A moment thus, straight and tall. Then it bowed toward the south and its light top, detached and flaring, fell on blackened ground. Flapjack's arms tightened about the girl.

"The wind!" he breathed. "It's changed again!"

Anne nodded. Little bushes already afire burned waveringly to the ground. Lines of trees stood etched as livid coals against the charred hillside. Blazing grass grew smoky, flickered, died to smoldering ashes. It was the rear of a conflagration, not its front.

The frozen spell that held the girl relaxed its sway. Warmth, sweet, delicious, flooded her body from the man's arms that held her, from her hands pressed against the breast of his shirt. She raised her eyes, at last, to his.

"Charlie!" She spoke softly. "We're alive. We don't have to die."

Her mother's voice, sharp, anxious, broke in upon them and with a quick movement Anne disengaged herself. Flapjack's hands caught hers and held them for an appreciable moment before he let her go.

"Anne!" began Mrs. Shirley, but at sight of the girl's white face she softened. "We've had a bad scare," she finished lamely.

They climbed up, recovered the packs and resaddled the horses, talking, laughing uproariously at nothing at all. Packsaddle led them down the river bed for several miles until he found the place he wanted, an island of solid ground between a muskeg and the stream.

"Sorry to drag you folks so far in the dark," he said to Mrs. Shirley. "But anyways you can sleep here. They can't no fire get at us however the wind blows. And we'll make a late start in the mornin'."

The next day Anne kept close to her mother. The girl was silent, overwhelmed by the tumult of her thoughts and feelings. Those few minutes in the river with Flapjack seemed to have turned her mind upside down, and like the bits of glass in a child's kaleidoscope her ideas were falling into new patterns. That ecstasy which had swept through her, was it only a natural exultation over the

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reprieve from death? Or was the fact that Flapjack— Her thoughts shied away from the puzzle. That sense of well-being which had been hers all through the summer, was it due to the silent companionship of this cowpuncher who seemed to read her every mood? She did not dare to think. Frantically she sought for the peace of that time behind the fire. It was gone, and something terrifying was in its place. Was it pain? Or a joy greater than any she had ever known? If her life had depended on the answer she could not have said. But she felt she could not face the man until she had reduced this new mood to some sort of composure.

So she rode beside her mother on a trail that was climbing now to a narrow bench above the river, and her mother after a shrewd glance at her troubled face respected her silence. It was not until the second day that she suddenly woke again to a sense of her surroundings, and then she pulled up her horse with a little cry. Three hundred feet below the Katchika tumbled between high rocky banks. The mountains had drawn near on either hand and bordered the river with heavily wooded shoulders that gave place above to dark rocks and patches of snow. They marched on down the valley one beyond the other as far as she could see, fading at last behind the veil of smoke that still hung in the air. Her mother's horse had halted too, and now Flapjack drew up alongside.

"You like big country now, don't you, Miss Anne?"

Smiling she shook her head.

"You missed it that time," she told him. "I love it."

His eyes scanned her face.

"I live in the big country," he said, and at his low voice that new fear seized her by the throat.

"Anne," said Mrs. Shirley when he was out of earshot, "this thing has gone far enough."

The girl's shoulders stiffened.

"What thing? I don't know what you mean?"

"Anne dear, don't put me off. Of course, you know what I mean. You ought not to allow Flapjack to talk to you like that. You will only hurt him."

"Hurt him?"

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"I understand that you are only being friendly, but he is evidently thinking of something more. When he wakes up he will be hurt. It's not as if there ever could be anything serious between you."

"Not that there is 'anything serious,' as you call it, between us, but I should like to know why you are so certain of its impossibility."

"Anne! That cowpuncher!"

The girl's color flooded her face.

"If it hadn't been for that cowpuncher and his friends we should all three be dead, somewhere back by Lesser Slave Lake!"

"That is no reason why you should let him ruin your life, but it certainly is a very good reason why you shouldn't ruin his."

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Shirley pushed her advantage.

"Charlie Peterson deserves a wife who will understand him. You never could, for he doesn't belong to your world."

"My world!" Anne's voice was trembling with anger now. "Mother! Just because he doesn't talk the way we do, haven't you seen the sort of man he is! I don't believe there's the faintest chance that he wants to marry me, but if he did and I refused him, it wouldn't be because I thought he wasn't good enough for me. It would be because I knew I wasn't good enough for him."

With these words she shook out her pony's reins, and galloped forward to ride with the men. And through the days that followed until they reached the Turn Again River she never reverted to the subject with her mother again; in fact her conversation was confined to the necessary discourse connected with their common tasks. But Mrs. Shirley observed with satisfaction that Flapjack Charlie no longer drew up to ride beside her daughter on the trail, and when the young people went off together it was always in a group of three.

Her satisfaction might have been clouded if she had known the basis of this truce. For Flapjack had followed Anne to the spring on the very afternoon of the discussion with her mother, had taken

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her bucket from her, and pulled her gently down to sit beside him on a log, imprisoning her hands in his own.

"Anne, dear," he said, "you can't run away from this. Don't you see we got to talk it out?"

Anne raised her troubled eyes to his, and suddenly to her own surprise she found herself crying. The man drew her to him and she sobbed like a frightened child against his breast, while he stroked her hair and waited.

"I don't want to make it no harder for you," he said when her sobs had grown still. "If you was cryin' because you know you can't love me, I shan't speak of it or bother you again."

Anne sat up, a lovely color on her face, but this time she did not meet his eyes.

"I think I could love you," she said in a voice so low that he had to bend his head to hear, "but I'm not sure that I do . . . Oh, Charlie, you always have understood. Can you understand me when I don't understand myself?"

The man's face was white, but he had himself well in hand.

"Try me," he said.

"I'm scared, Charlie. Scared to death."

"I see. And that's serious. But was—were you scared before—before the fire?"

"No, Charlie. Never."

"Then what you really want is time?"

"Oh!" she gasped. "Could you give me time?"

She was looking at him now and he thought her dark pleading eyes with the tears upon their lashes were the most beautiful things he had ever seen.

"You're goin' to have all the time you want, my sweet. Till we get to the Klondike, that is. When we reach Dawson, I got an idea you're a-goin' to marry me. But meanwhile we're steppin' back to where we was—were—day before yesterday in the mornin'. The fire and what I said to you to-day is just a bad dream, that I shan't remember till you show me you've come to think it ain't so bad."

He rose and held out his hand to help her to her feet.

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"Come along, Miss Anne."

If his heart failed him at her radiant look of relief, he gave no sign. He picked up the pail of water and walked beside her to the camp. Just before they would have stepped into the clearing where the fire was made he stopped her and took her hand. Turning it over he lightly dropped a kiss upon her palm. Then smiling into her surprised eyes he curled her fingers down over the spot his lips had touched.

"Just put that away somewheres," he said in a matter-of-fact tone, "until you're ready to dream again."

He handed her the pail of water and held the branches aside. So she returned to the camp as she had left it, alone, and there was nothing for her mother to question or remark.

The new Police trail which the party had picked up again beyond the forest fire led them across the Katchika just above its forks, about sixty miles from the Pass. The ford ran along a diagonal gravel-bar to an island, over the island and through a slough to firm ground. From there the trail turned away from the river, striking west and northwest up a rolling valley, with mountains running parallel on either hand. Heavenly day succeeded day as they followed this valley. The sunlight slanted across grassy glades where trees were spaced graciously. The stiff gray-green needles of the jack-pine and the twinkling leaves of the poplars already giving a faint prophecy of autumn gold made contrast to the dark foliage of the spruce. They might have been traveling through some lovely forgotten park where moose and mountain sheep wandered at will. They never saw the animals themselves. Frightened by the horses they kept out of sight, but their tracks were everywhere. Brooks ran and chuckled over the stones and the little lakes they passed reflected a cloudless sky for almost a week. Then suddenly one afternoon clouds gathered from every side and thickened to blot out the sun, although the air in the valley was breathless and still. Packsaddle gazed at the working clouds uneasily, noting the torn streamers of vapor that told of wind.

"They'll be hell a-poppin' presently," he remarked to the group around the camp-fire. "We'd best ride herd on them horses if we

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don't want some of 'em to get away on us. And, Preacher, you better pound down the tent-stakes."

Anne seized her saddle at his word and stood up, whistling for Peanut. The old freighter caught her father's eye and winked.

"If we'd only had her young enough we could a trained her into a regular rider."

The girl made a face at him.

"You're jealous," was her audacious boast, "because you know I'm a better rider than you are, right now."

She was bridling and saddling the pony with a facility of which they all were proud. Now gathering up the reins and turning her back to the horse's head she set her foot in the reversed stirrup. At the instant the pony flashed ahead full-speed, and the girl spinning into the air settled easily in her seat. It was a perfect "running mount."

"I don't mind all the rest of it so much," said Mrs. Shirley with a sigh as she watched her go, "but I do wish she wouldn't get on that horse that way. It looks so hoydenish."

A chill wind from the upper mountains was beginning to whine among the trees, and the horses were already stirring and stamping uneasily in the park where they had been grazing when the three men and the girl rode out around them. They moved at the shouts of the circling riders into a more compact bunch on the lee side of the clearing, where they stood, their manes tossing in the wind, and their eyes gleaming in the eerie light. With a blinding flash of lightning and a terrific crash of thunder the storm broke about them, attended by a howling fury of a wind that drove the rain before it in such sheets as no horse could face. Reluctantly Anne let her pony turn his tail, and crouching over her saddle-horn prepared to take the lashing with what resignation she could muster. Andy's gray silhouette she could make out on her right in an attitude similar to her own. Flapjack she knew was behind at her left, but the rain was too heavy for her to see him save when the frequent lightning lit the clearing. The noise of the storm became tremendous, thunder repeated by the echoing hills until it drowned all sound except the maniac shrieking of the wind.

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Anne cowered on her horse, her head turned, her face sheltered behind the crook of her arm, watching the play of lightning, and suddenly she saw in a blaze of white light a great tree there to the left tottering to a fall, and Flapjack frantically striving to drive the horses away from its path. The instant of sight was so short that all motion seemed still, then utter blackness followed and a cataclysm of sound. A second flash showed her that the tree was prone, the horses had scattered but the figure of the rider was no longer there. With a wild cry, the girl tried to turn her pony. She kicked and lashed him with the end of her reins, but he refused to stir.

Anne slipped to her feet and started running, but before she took many steps the wind seized her and flung her back against her pony's flank, where she clung half fainting. Then as suddenly as it had come the storm went by. Through her daze the girl sensed that the rain was no longer lashing and that the wind was dying in a diminuendo of sound. She had no consciousness of mounting. It seemed as if instantly she found herself again on her feet beside the fallen tree. There were horses caught beneath it, she could see, and one was kicking feebly. She tore at the branches and tried with all her strength to thrust her body through but it was fruitless. She must have help. And as she turned she saw Flapjack, afoot and plastered with mud, coming out from around the uprooted bole of the tree.

"Charlie! Charlie!" she cried.

Relief seemed to have weakened her knees. She could not move but she held out her hands and when he had come to her she caught at him.

"My darling!" he exclaimed in horror at her white face. "What is it?"

"You're not hurt? You're sure you're not hurt? I saw the tree go over and I tried to get to you."

Her hands were feeling his arms, his breast, and he gently drew her into his embrace where she clung in silence, her face hidden, her whole body shaken by the pounding of her heart. After a long moment her lover lifted her face.

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"You're not afraid now," he said, a transfiguring wonder in his eyes.

"Charlie!" she answered. "I only know I could never, never live without you. If you had been killed I should just have had to die too."

He stooped and kissed her hands, her brow, her eyes, her rain-cool cheek before his lips found hers.

It was Peanut that roused them with a gentle nudge. The sun was shining and he wanted to be relieved of his saddle and sodden blanket.

"My God!" cried Flapjack. "Them horses under the tree!"

With the light ax from his belt he stripped away the upper branches to get a better view, but there was nothing to be done. Two horses had been caught, one had evidently been killed instantly and a shot ended the struggling of the other. Then the boy and girl returned to camp. Excitement over the storm and the death of the horses sufficed to keep their secret for the evening, but in a stolen moment at the spring before they parted for the night, they agreed that they must tell Anne's parents on the morrow.

"I have an idea your mother ain't a-goin' to be too pleased," said Flapjack ruefully.

"You'd better let me talk to her alone first, and I'll make her see it," said the girl with a confidence she was far from feeling.

It proved to be even harder than she expected. They had reached the Turn Again River and she chose to speak while she was waiting with her mother at the top of the bank for the men to decide about the ford. The river came out of a deep pass in the mountains to the southwest, and the girl kept her eyes on the silent giants of the range while they talked. She needed the sense of their sustaining majesty. Mrs. Shirley was shocked, for she had hoped the matter had been settled days before and quite otherwise than this. The foundation of her opposition was her fear that these two were an ill-assorted pair whose marriage was certain to be wrecked on a reef of misunderstanding. She pointed out the difference in education and would have harped upon it, if it had not been for the white-lipped anger of her daughter's face. Forced to abandon this she

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made the most of that sense of fright which Anne had admitted she had felt at first.

"If he were your true mate, the one man in the world for you,"—Mrs. Shirley sincerely held the creed of her day—"you would have known no fear. This shows you are not meant for each other, however much you think so now."

"I don't believe it. I can't believe it," Anne cried hotly. "Charlie understood. It was just because he tried to rush me. When I came to it by myself I was not afraid."

"When time had had a chance to dull that sense of fear which was your only protection, you mean," her mother retorted with equal heat. "And then to take advantage of you when you were startled. I can't forgive Charlie Peterson for tricking you like that."

"Take advantage? Tricking me?" Mother, you can't expect me to sit here and listen to such lies. For that's what they are! Wicked lies."

"Anne! Anne!"

"Don't talk to me. I love him and I'm going to marry him. And if you don't understand him enough to keep from thinking such things as that, I don't care what you say!"

With a furious cut of the reins she sent her pony over the edge of the bank. The stones and loose earth showered from the trail down to the beach a hundred feet below, but the girl was too angry to check her speed, and her wise cow-pony found his way somehow to the bottom. She heard her mother calling her but she could not or would not look back, and then the falling stones told her that her mother was following. With another lash of her reins Anne urged her pony on along the beach. The ford was about five hundred yards upstream. She would get in among the horses where no one could talk to her. Again she heard her name, and still she would not turn, until a strange, sliding crash brought her to a whirling stand.

Lovell's pony being heavier had missed his footing on the narrow trail about halfway down, and after a vain attempt to slide on his haunches, an effort which Mrs. Shirley was not skillful

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enough to assist, he had pitched and rolled headlong. A cloud of dust hid everything as Anne went flying back, but it settled as she drew near to let her see the horse rising to his feet, and her mother's crumpled body on the stones. The horse snorted pitifully, but the girl had no thought for him. She was out of the saddle and, kneeling by her mother's side, had lifted her head to pillow it in her arms. And so the men found her when they came up, kissing the white face and talking brokenly.

"It's Anne, Mother. Please open your eyes and speak to me. I didn't mean it. You know I didn't mean it, don't you, dear?"

Her father and Packsaddle straightened the inert form to an easier position, but when he had done this much the old freighter stepped back and took off his hat. Anne's eyes were fixed in terror on her father as he held her mother's wrist and then reached in to feel her heart.

"She's only fainted. Tell me she's only fainted," she implored. Mr. Shirley's face was gray.

"This is more than a faint, Daughter," he said.

"Not dead!" cried the girl. "She can't be dead!" Again she searched his face. "If she is, I killed her—you know God wouldn't let me do that!"

The strangeness of this speech did not pierce to her father's consciousness. He answered her first words only.

"No, Anne," he said, "she is not dead. She is more alive now than you or I. But it may be a long time before we see her again." His voice broke with the last words, but his eyes still met his daughter's compellingly. "We must be brave, dear, as she would have us be."

Some one had folded a coat for a pillow and slowly Anne laid her mother's head upon it. Those who watched her would have said she had shrunk within herself. She seemed smaller, somehow, and her face was an ashen mask. She sat beside the body while the men made a litter of branches, her eyes never leaving the still face, but she did not cry or sob; and she walked silently behind the men as they carried their light burden across the ford and laid it down beneath a great spruce tree that seemed the guardian of the place. Under this tree they dug the grave and with unwavering

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voice Mr. Shirley read the service for the dead, that tremendous declaration of faith in the reality of the unseen.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in me though he were dead yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Side by side father and daughter stood while the grave was filled in, and when the last shovelful of earth had been laid upon the narrow mound and the rude cross had been set at its head, the men came one by one to wring their hands in silent sympathy. Flapjack Charlie was last, but when he would have spoken to Anne she drew back, warding him off with a pitiful gesture.

"Don't! Oh, don't come near me!" she cried with such anguish in eyes and voice that he stopped aghast.

His face went white under his tan, but he turned and left her without a word.

How Anne lived through the next few days she never knew. There was plenty of work to do, cooking for the camp, but work could not keep her from thinking, and every now and again she would lift her head from some task, hearing her mother calling her name, or living again through the sickening horror of that sliding crash. Some time during the first week Andy Bell came on her alone.

"Lady," he said, twisting his hat around and around in embarrassment, "I couldn't help seeing you that afternoon of the big storm, and if there is ever anythin' I can do for you or Flapjack, will you let me know?"

"Andy!" she cried. "Oh, there is something you can do now! I can't speak to him, but it isn't fair he shouldn't know."

"No, it ain't," he encouraged her. "Do you want me to take him a message?"

She nodded.

"Tell him I was talking with Mother about him just before—at the top of the bank. Mother said something about him—she didn't understand Charlie, Andy—and I got angry and said dreadful things. I was running away from her, Andy, and she tried to follow me. She was calling me and she could not look where her

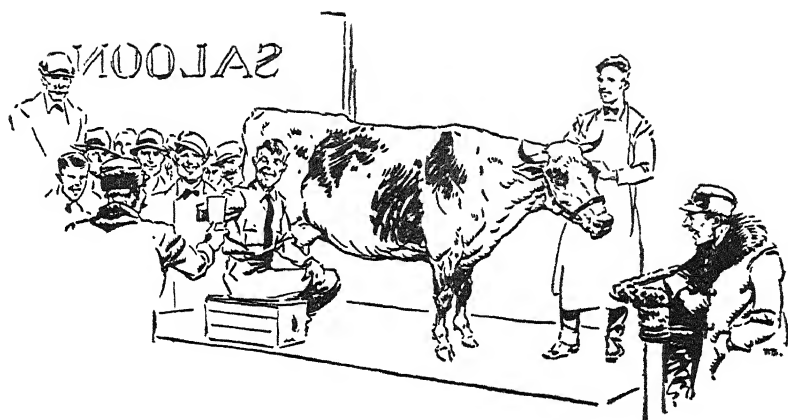
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horse was going." The girl stopped, battling for self-control. In a moment she went on. "That's all, I guess. Perhaps he can understand."

Anne hardly noticed when they came out on the old Hudson's Bay Trail from Sylvester's Outpost to Dease River Landing, except to be aware that the road was now wide enough for her to ride beside her father. There were hot days when the mosquitoes and flies were bad, but if it had not been for the necessity for making grease for the horses she would scarcely have known. Dimly she was conscious that they were penetrating deep into mountain country and once she did see that their way led almost south. She questioned Packsaddle about this, and he replied with delight because something from outside had caught her notice.

"We're swingin' around a mess a high mountains, Miss Anne," he said, and would have talked on, but the flicker of interest had died in her eyes, leaving the stony grief he dreaded to see.

In a week more of travel they reached and crossed the Four Mile River with the broken abutment of its ruined bridge, climbed a ridge and looked down on Sylvester's Post across the sluggish Dease. And Anne's only thought was that she would never see her mother again, and that even her grave was now ninety miles away.



Chapter XIV

THE TWO SURVEY DAWSON

DAWSON CITY at the corner of Front and First streets presented a strange view for eyes accustomed by long months to the solitude of northern rivers. Kansas and Slim with their Canadian companions stood gazing. The fringe of the bank above the boat landing from which they had just climbed was edged with the warehouses of the trading companies. At the nearest end of this row of large sheds sheathed with corrugated iron a small building with an iron roof and no windows boasted the sign "Canadian Bank of Commerce." A long line of men was passing slowly in at its one door crowding past emerging customers. Beyond the warehouses, shacks and canvas booths clung to the river bank resting at the rear on sloping piles. A sea of mud, here lying in pools, there churned into half-solid muck, separated these river-bank structures from the uneven boardwalk skirting the east side of the street and formed an arena for countless dogs that sniffed and snarled, skirmished and fought up and down its length. Opposite the boat landing large well-built saloons and dance halls lined the boardwalk, the Aurora Number One, the Pioneer, the Dominion, the Opera House, the Monte Carlo, and at the next street intersection the Bank Saloon with a flag pole topping it. To north and south from this central block, shacks and booths,

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saloons and gambling houses varied by an occasional hotel extended in two lines, unbroken save on the east side by incoming streets, to where a low hill with a large frame building on it terminated the road at one end and the Police enclosure shut it off at the other with a ten-foot stockade of poles.

Along the boardwalk, filling the booths, spilling up the street intersections, and passing ceaselessly in and out of the swinging doors of hotel, gambling house and saloon moved the crowd, restless and keenly alert. Old timers in faded overalls and mud-stained boots jostled newcomers in black mackinaw suits, burly big-handed sons of the soil brushed shoulders with men who had evidently been schoolmasters. Here and there a woman passed through a throng that instantly gave her space. Usually she was well-dressed, and if her close-fitting jacket, following the latest fashion, accentuated the curve of hip and breast, the face under the coquettishly tilted hat was a mask of demure discretion as with murmured thanks she acknowledged the courtesy of the passage so readily granted her.

"Orderly crowd, ain't it?" observed Slim.

"You bet," agreed Kansas, "and here comes the reason."

He pointed to a half-loaded lumber wagon that was plowing up the street sunk nearly to its hubs in the mud. The four-horse team was plunging knee-deep and the driver had jumped from his seat in the wagon to lighten the load. He was hatless and coatless, but the hip-boots he wore did not entirely hide the yellow stripe on the seam of his dark-blue trousers.

"The Mounties!" exclaimed the Canadians.

Kansas nodded.

"And I'm here to remark," he added, "that I'm plumb glad to see 'em again."

A slim young man in a gray flannel shirt drew up beside the four. He had just come out from a side door in the Alaska Commercial Company's warehouse nearest to the bank, and had picked his way carefully over stepping stones to the duckboard on which they were standing. Now he stretched, drew a long breath, and then hooking his thumbs in his belt surveyed his neighbors with frank interested eyes.

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"Just got here?" he asked.

The four nodded.

"How'd you come in? From up-river or down?"

"Down."

"Then you must have been on a steamer."

"The *Oil City*," Sutherland confirmed his guess.

The young man addressed him eagerly.

"Did she bring a scow along with her? For the Canadian Bank of Commerce?"

"No," said Sutherland.

"Of course she wouldn't!" ejaculated the young man bitterly. "We've been expecting that scow for a month, and I'm willing to bet you—no, you're chechakos, so we won't make a wager, but you'll see. It won't get here before the freeze!"

"Stranger," drawled Kansas, "you talk as if that scow was plumb important."

The young man transferred his gaze from the Canadian to the tall cowpuncher.

"Yankee," he replied, "you haven't said a tenth of it. It's a long sad story. But if you've just come you ought to see the city. Shall I show it to you? Having had my head in a charcoal furnace all day I need a little air."

They all agreed to this, and their guide led the way across the morass of the street to the sidewalk opposite.

"You may notice some lacks in the paving of our main street," he said as he stamped the mud from his feet. "They say there are some stretches of corduroy underneath it somewhere, but with lumber at two hundred dollars a thousand, even Klondikers couldn't keep that up. Now they dump in sawdust from the three sawmills in town, without—as you observe—any appreciable effect."

He pushed through the crowd to the door of the Aurora saloon.

"A stroll in Dawson City begins with refreshments," he told them, "and there's no better place than Tom Chisholm's."

The interior of their first Dawson saloon came as a distinct surprise to the newcomers, with the shining mahogany of its

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massive bar, the brilliance of its plate-glass mirrors, the dull gleam of the heavy gold frames on its oil paintings, but above all with the quiet of the crowd that packed it from the front doors to the rear. They stood in knots and talked, these men from the mines, and the tempo of their speech was deliberate. They sat at the gaming-tables, or stood behind their friends and watched the play, apparently with equal indifference to the turn of the cards.

"And yet they're bettin' heavy," remarked Slim to their guide. "I ain't used to them there ounces. How much real money is there on that game?"

Their Dawson friend scanned the table indicated with a practiced eye.

"About two thousand dollars."

Sutherland whistled softly.

"A case of 'easy come, easy go,' I suppose," he said.

The Dawson man sipped his drink meditatively.

"Not exactly. It's quick money, of course, but no Klondike gold is 'easy.' You'll see that when you begin getting it. But they are used to big prices for anything. In a town where watermelons cost twenty-five dollars apiece a hundred dollars doesn't look like very big money. That painting now," he pointed to a large canvas of Morro Castle on the opposite wall, "Tom paid what you would call a fortune for that. Wanted to have the first one, you know. And I will say crowds came in to see it when it was first hung."

"They did!" queried Kansas in astonishment, his eyes on the picture. "Why? It ain't as pretty as this 'Moonlight on the Yukon' to my thinkin'."

It was the turn of their guide to show amazement.

"Haven't you fellows heard of the war?"

"War! What War? Who's fightin'?"

"Why, you are, Yankee! The U. S. A. Fighting Spain over Cuba. Didn't you see the bulletin? Here, gulp down that drink and I'll show it to you now."

And as he shoved them through the crowd to the door and out along the boardwalk he gave them a rapid summary of recent

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events as Dawson saw them, the spectacular disaster to the *Maine*, Dewey's descent upon Manila Bay and the capture of Santiago.

"Any news we get is several months old, of course, but the whole town has to hear about it. When the first papers got here telling about the beginning of it a man bought one for a hundred and fifty dollars. Then he hired a hall—Heaven alone knows what he paid for that—and charged five dollars admission to come in and hear him read the reports. He made money on it, too. The crowds were wild. Then some one hit on this idea and his big time was over. You can get the gist of things here, and if you wait long enough you can buy a paper for seventy-five cents."

So saying he halted the four before a strip of canvas which hung from a pole, and which bore in flaunting letters "Latest News from the Philippines."

"I'll duck along to the post office," he said, pointing on down the street. "If you care to, you can meet me again there when you have looked this over."

Kansas and Slim scanned the flapping poster eagerly while the two Canadians looked over their shoulders.

"Just where are them Philippines? Do you know, Campbell?"

"I'm thinking they're somewhere in the Pacific, Kansas."

"I thought they was from what it says here, and it sorta strikes me that Uncle Sam is gettin' a long way off his range. Wasn't this a war about Cuba?"

"Well, of course, the Spanish fleet was anchored there," said Sutherland.

"Sure! I can understand capturin' the fleet all right. That had to be done. But they're takin' the islands now."

"Them islands belongs to Spain, though," put in Slim, "and we're fightin' Spain."

"Yes," admitted Kansas, "but they ain't Cuba, and this was a war about Cuba. It don't look like sense to me."

"You shouldn't expect to see sense in a complicated layout like a war," remarked Slim. "Anyway we're winnin' it."

"You bet!" agreed Kansas. "Looks like it might be over any day now."

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In front of the post office they found their new friend talking with one of a long line of men waiting to be admitted to the little shack.

"Hello, chechakos," he called to them. "I want you to meet an old timer in this country, Alexander McDonald, sometimes called the King of the Klondike. You'll have to supply your own names. Mine, by the way, is Lowe."

"If you're expecting mail," observed McDonald when the greetings had been exchanged, "you'll want to come here early in the morning. It's an all-day job to get it. The banks, like your friend here, and the government offices can use the side door. And the ladies. But the rest of us have to line up."

"What's the meaning of all this?" asked Campbell, nodding his head toward the outside of the post office and the fronts of the adjoining buildings which were covered with letters tacked to the logs.

"Oh," explained Lowe, "anybody who gets in there calls for the mail for all his friends and then tacks it up outside. Saves time all around. Have you friends in town ahead of you who might know that you're coming in? No? Well, then, there's no use to look them over. The pack-train will be in from Sulphur Creek pretty soon now, so if I'm to show you this town we must be mushing along."

As they turned away from the post office sudden pandemonium broke loose on the street, with the crashing of drums, the trumpeting of horns and the harsh shouts of men.

"Must be eight o'clock," observed Lowe. "The dance halls are opening."

For ten minutes or more the "callers out" standing before the doors of the various houses of entertainment, accompanied by their assorted bands, bawled enticements and descriptions of attractions within, and then they withdrew to take charge of their dance-floors. Against the noise of the four contending "orchestras" which were soon in full swing, the voices of the crowds on the street rose higher. Dawson seemed to awake, blatant and uneasy beneath the splendor of the evening sky. The mountains, broken only by

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the valley of the Klondike, shut in the boggy plain on which sprawled the town, from the south clear around to the north. Their forested slopes culminated in a bold knob with the white scar of a landslide on its face and a rocky shoulder that fell steeply into the Yukon. This hill with one slightly less precipitous on the western bank formed the Portals through which the river swept in a sharp curve on its way to the sea. The majestic mantle of the sunset flung along the ridge mocked the tawdry glamour of the town as the mountain masses dwarfed the huddled cabins on the plain.

There was little planning to be discerned in the building of Dawson. Back of Front Street and its parallel, Second Avenue, where Lowe told them the dance-hall girls lived, a few shacks and innumerable tents stood in a confused jumble, however the whim of the owners had faced them. Straggling footpaths led from the town up to where Bonanza Avenue notched the wooded side of the mountain with its line of log houses facing the river.

"There's where the Eldorado and Bonanza kings live," explained Lowe. "Those are real houses too, glass windows, carpets, lace curtains, damask table-cloths, everything."

The big white building at the north end of Front Street, Lowe said, was St. Mary's Hospital, full just now with scurvy and typhoid patients.

"And so are the Good Samaritan up near the fort and two barracks inside the enclosure," he went on. "We're bound to have typhoid, of course. They say there are over sixteen thousand people here now, if you take in Lousetown and Klondike City; but there's not a yard of sewer in the place or waterpipe either, and here's the water supply."

A cart drawn by dogs was moving briskly down the street. It was filled with the square tins already familiar to the four who had been deckhands on the *Oil City* as containers for coal oil.

"What's in 'em now?" asked Kansas. "Water?"

"Drinking water," amended Lowe. "Drawn from what they call a spring just below St. Mary's Hospital, and sold at twenty-five

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cents a tin. Don't you touch a bit of it, chechakos, unless you boil it yourselves."

They moved along the boardwalk with the moving throng and Lowe pointed out the hotels, the Green Pine and the Fairview, where board could be had for twelve dollars a day or lodging for six-fifty a night.

"We're puttin' up on the boat still, Kansas and me," said Slim. "Bein' American citizens the captain can't fire us in a foreign port. We ain't working so you would notice it, but we're sure feedin' three times a day regular."

"You're lucky," said Lowe. "And you others?"

The Canadians grinned.

"We have a tent," said Sutherland, "and if you could show us where to pitch it—"

"Come along!" cried their guide, setting off at a rapid pace. They followed him south along Front Street, around the stockade of the Police enclosure and up to the rising ground above the Klondike River where he stopped before a cabin that stood somewhat by itself. They had a glimpse of a structure more sturdily built than most, with a few ragged skeletons of trees behind it connected together by a network of rope, and then the door swung open on a lamp-lighted interior and released the unmistakable fragrance of baking bread. A stout little woman with short gray hair parted on the side stood peering out into the dusk.

"Why, Mr. Lowe! Didn't you get your laundry? One of the boys who was in this afternoon said he would leave it at the bank for you."

"I got it all right, Mrs. Wills. And I'm not after a bread ticket either, because I have half the last loaf left. But two friends of mine here are looking for a place to spread a tent, and I hoped you'd give them permission to set it up alongside your cabin. They've just come in, and I have an idea they'll be glad not to be in the thick of it down below."

Mrs. Wills surveyed the two Canadians who stepped forward into the lamplight and she smiled.

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"Any friends of Mr. Lowe's are welcome. You'll find it more level on the side toward the river, and mind the clothes-lines."

Sutherland hesitated before the door.

"I don't suppose we could buy a loaf of that bread you're baking?"

She shook her head at him.

"Not that bread, you couldn't. It's all sold. And to-morrow's tickets are all gone too. Sunday I don't bake, but if you've a mind to wait till Monday I have a few tickets for that batch left."

The newcomers stared at each other.

"You won't regret it," Lowe assured them. "It's worth waiting for. Best bread in Dawson."

"I'll take a ticket, then," said Sutherland.

"And I'll have another," added his partner. "It smells grand." Again Mrs. Wills shook her head.

"I can only spare one loaf to a partnership. My oven is so small I can only bake two at a time and ten loaves a day is the most I can manage with the washing and all. So we make 'em go as far as we can."

"And quite right, too," acknowledged Campbell. "We'll have one ticket and share the loaf between us."

He reached in his pocket for his purse.

"One dollar," announced Mrs. Wills, seeing his gesture.

"One doll—" Campbell began, but a sharp nudge from Lowe brought him up, and Mrs. Wills turned away to get the ticket. In silence he accepted the slip of paper bearing the date, Monday, September 12, and the number 6. Carefully he folded it and stowed it in his pocketbook. They were halfway back to town before he found his voice, and even then it sounded weak.

"Man!" he remarked. "It must be grand bread."

Shortly after they turned on to the boardwalk a burly man in dingy overalls with a flushed angry face seized their guide by the arm.

"Lowe, you black-hearted scoundrel, I've been lookin' all over this town for you. What the hell do you mean by givin' my pard-

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ner a return of fifteen dollars and twenty cents an ounce on our season's clean-up?"

"That's the way it assayed, Hartley."

"Say! You can't put that over on me. Here, take a squint at this and you'll see an honest assay."

He dragged from his breast pocket a ragged piece of paper. Lowe's face was white, but his hands were steady as he took it.

"Well, what about it?" he asked as he handed it back.

"'What about it?'" shouted Hartley. "The U. S. assayer in the San Francisco mint certifies my gold to be worth fifteen-seventy, that's all. Fifty cents an ounce is a hell of a big toll for you Canucks to take, particularly when you've already got a ten per cent royalty."

A murmur of assent ran around the crowd that had gathered, but Lowe did not flinch.

"Hartley, you're yelping before you're hurt. Read your U. S. certificate again. That figure is the fineness value of the sample you sent, the amount of gold metal in it. Mine is the actual return per ounce of gold metal. You're bound to lose something for impurities."

Hartley scanned his certificate dubiously. He was still breathing hard, and Lowe went on:

"Come back with me, man, and pick out any kind of sample you like that will represent the average of your dust, watch me melt it, watch the brick weighed, and then I'll give you a clipping from that very brick that you can send anywhere you please for comparative assay. I'm not afraid of the result."

The big man raised his head.

"Lowe, you're a white man and I'm a damn fool," he said.

Lowe laughed.

"Well, will you come along with me?"

"You bet I'll come with you, but not to the bank. I'll set you up to the longest and coolest drink in—"

An interruption from outside the circle broke into the parley.

"Tom Chisholm's got a cow!" some one yelled. "Fresh milk, you sourdoughs! She's coming across the Klondike from Lousetown."

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As one man the crowd turned toward the Klondike River while the bearer of the news, swept along in the throng, added further particulars.

"She's a Holstein. Just came in on a scow from over the Pass. Tom had to pay a thousand dollars to get her. He's bringing her to the saloon."

It was easy to see the progress of the rumor by the crowds pouring out of successive doors. The band from the Opera House formed up outside to become the head of a welcoming procession, and the rest of the population of Dawson swarmed along the street and around the Police enclosure to the Klondike's bank, for once regardless of the mud. Tom Chisholm toiled up the slope leading his prize by a halter to be greeted by a tremendous shout. He paused at the top to mop his perspiring face and to call for room. He was an immense man with a frank smile, now tinged with triumph.

"Don't crowd her, boys!" he begged. "We'll get her up on the boardwalk where you can all see her, and then I'm taking her into the saloon to milk her."

Enthusiastic shouts met this announcement and by a ceremonious parade along the boardwalk the cow was led to the saloon and coaxed and urged up an unsteady incline of three loose planks to a platform hastily constructed by the front corner of the bar. Hemmed in by a dense crowd of men, she stood uneasily sniffing the stale air with her moist muzzle lifted. She had obviously been frightened, but with the cessation of pressure about her and an abatement of the noise, she began to view her surroundings with more calm. She could even relax sufficiently to switch her black and white sides with her tail and to search the platform before her for fodder. One of Tom's gamblers struggled through the crowd with an armload of hay.

"Got it at the Police barracks, Tom," he panted. "But they say they're short up there and you'll have to get your own supply right away."

Tom nodded absently. He had climbed onto the bar beside the

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cow, followed by a lanky youth with a look of the farm about him.

"Now, boys," began Chisholm, "I'll have to ask you to be as quiet as you can for a while. We're going to milk her and she mustn't be scared by unnecessary yelling." He paused while the bartender passed up a case of beer which when turned on its side served as a stool for the milker. Then he went on: "There are mugs at the other end of the bar. Get 'em and line up. We're going to supply directly into your mug, price five dollars a glass."

"And fair enough, Tom," called a voice from the crowd.

"We'll serve you until she runs dry, and then the rest will have to come back to-morrow night."

"What about to-morrow morning?" asked a man in the front row. "They ought to be milked twice a day, Tom."

"Morning's milking is going to be saved for the hospitals, if they want it," announced Chisholm firmly. "And now who gets the first glassful? I'll raffle it off to the highest bidder, the proceeds to go to St. Mary's. Step up and shake out your pokes, boys. Remember the fellows lying sick down there."

The crowd stepped up and bidding was fast and furious at first, although it soon became a contest between the miner Hartley and a sallow-faced gambler from the Monte Carlo, disputing the title at last by half-dollar raises. In the end Hartley won the first glass for a price of fifty dollars, and when he had received it, warm and foaming, he carried it across the room to present to Lowe in handsome apology for his hasty speech. The reconciliation thus solemnized, he drifted away in the throng, leaving the assayer and his four companions perched on a table near a front window that commanded a view of the street before the bank.

"If I see that pack-train from Sulphur I'll have to duck out," said Lowe.

"Surely you won't have to work this late, man?" expostulated Sutherland.

"Up to eleven o'clock for pack-trains from the mines. Won't have to run the assay to-night, of course, but I've got to accept the gold and put it in safe keeping."

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"Are you alone on the job?"

"Just now I am. My chief and the assistant manager have gone outside. We're looking for them back with that scow I was asking you about. He can't come too soon for me. Shoveling charcoal day after day and breathing nitric acid fumes instead of air rapidly loses its first charm."

"And it don't seem none too safe when you do stick your nose outa doors," drawled Kansas.

"Meaning Hartley? Oh, those fellows are the least of our worries. You ought to have seen us last spring if you wanted a glimpse of real trouble."

"How was that?"

"Well, you see, neither of us assayers held this sort of job back home. We volunteered for the Klondike, and the head office signed us on as assayers. Then they sent the chief up to New York to be put over the jumps at the Sub-Treasury and I was sent to a commercial chemist in Boston. Last spring we sailed from Vancouver with a blueprint of an assay furnace and bricks to build it. We borrowed that storehouse for the bank from the Alaska Commercial Company—it had been used for fish for dog-food, but it happened to be empty at the time, except for the smell—and we set up the furnace in the warehouse next door which was also unused. We built our furnace by the blueprint, we started our fire and opened our doors for business. In comes a miner and thumps down his dust. The teller in the bank gives him a receipt for the weight turned in, numbers the bags with the number of the receipt, gives him an advance of fourteen dollars an ounce, you see, and tells him to call around next day for the balance due when the result of his essay is known. Fine! Then they bring the gold over to the chief and me, and we select a representative sample from all the bags, a fifty ounce sample, and put her in the furnace.

"Well, you wouldn't understand the details if I were to give 'em to you. Suffice it to say that first melt gave us a horrible mixture, a mass of alloy which we couldn't assay and also couldn't return to the miner. Meanwhile the bank was doing a booming business and more lots of dust kept coming across to us. Most of

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the gentlemen who owned the dust were just waiting to be paid off before starting home and they began calling at the bank on the second day, early and often.

"We didn't dare admit the truth, and by and by the office staff ran out of excuses. They said each assay was being dealt with in turn, and perhaps the assayers could say when Cyclone Bill's certificate would be ready. So Cyclone Bill and all his little mates began coming in to watch the melt."

"Holy cats!" murmured Kansas.

"Exactly, only more so."

"What did you do?"

"Well, one of us blew the furnace, and looked very busy, and the other talked brightly with Cyclone Bill until the fumes got jolly thick, and then invited him out for a drink. It is fairly easy to lose a man in Dawson if you want to, you know. Always crowds everywhere.

"That went on for several days and they seemed like centuries to us. We were working all night on that mess of alloy but it wouldn't come unamalgamated. Then one morning on one of these thirst expeditions I ran onto an Austrian who admitted he was a graduate of the School of Mines in Vienna. Did I snatch that man over to our furnace? I don't think he rightly knew what had hit him, but he bore up. He walked around the plagued thing and stared at the blueprint and then went back around the furnace again. At last he asked for a hammer and when we gave it to him he knocked out a few bricks to give it a better draft. And in a few minutes he had that first melt poured. We took him on for a month or so as assistant assayer. Paid him fifteen dollars a day and felt he earned every penny— Hello! There's my pack-train. Good night, fellows! When you strike your mine I hope you bring us your accounts to handle."

"You bet we will, Lowe," they assured him earnestly, as they wormed their way with him through the crowd and across the muddy street. At the corner they stopped to watch him plunge in between the loaded mules. Then they slid down the bank to the wharf where the *Oil City* was tied. Campbell and Sutherland

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shouldered tent and bedding but refused any help from the others.

"Slim, man," said Campbell, "you look like a ghost now. Go away in, and put that cold of yours between blankets or we'll be having to take you up to this St. Mary's we heard about to-night. We'll be doing our real moving to-morrow and then you can give us a hand if you've a mind."

But the next morning when Campbell and Sutherland were carrying the rest of their stuff up the hill to the open space by Mrs. Wills' cabin, Kansas and Slim were sitting on hard-bottomed chairs in Dr. Good's office. Slim's cold had become suddenly worse and his partner had dragged him, protesting profanely, in search of medical advice. Tom Chisholm had directed them to the Winnipeg specialist as the best doctor in town.

Dr. Good having made his examination sat with the earpieces of his stethoscope clasped about his neck and its trumpet-like end hanging. His thick black brows were knitted and he had been purposely avoiding the anxious gaze of the two cowpunchers. Now he swung in his pivot-chair so he could face them and took a prescription pad from his desk.

"I shall give you some medicine, of course, Mr. Jackson," he said, writing rapidly, "which should give you immediate relief. But unfortunately that is not all there is to be said. Our greatest danger here in the winter is that men will have their lungs frost-bitten. Only a man who is in excellent shape can hope to avoid it, if he is out in our bitterest weather. You expected to be mining, I suppose? Exactly, and miners are out in all temperatures. It would be nothing less than suicide for you to remain. Your lungs are congested now. Nothing that you couldn't throw off in a decent climate, but also nothing to start a Klondike winter properly. My advice to you is that you take passage on the next boat out."

Slim and Kansas exchanged startled glances.

"I just got here, doc. I doubt if I could raise the price of a ticket home. I ain't drawed my time from the *Oil City* yet, seein' as I wanted to go on livin' on her as long as she was in town, but it ain't likely that'd be enough for a ticket to the States, as things is valued here."

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"You're drawing wages from the *Oil City*?"

"Shipped on her from Fort Yukon as deckhands."

"Then you're all lined up and ready to go," declared the doctor. "Just you stay on her as a deckhand for her trip down-river. Your wages at—what is it? Ten a day?—will buy your ticket from St. Michael's at the mouth of the Yukon to Seattle, and give you a tidy little sum to take home besides. You're lucky, boy. So don't you make any mistake about going. Your partner here doesn't want you to stay when it means a serious risk."

"Bet your life, no," Kansas chimed in. "I'll see he gets off, doc, if I have to get him dead drunk and roll him aboard the *Oil City* in a wheelbarrow."

"That's the idea!" cried the doctor, and he laughed with a delighted chuckle that contrasted oddly with his rather grim manner.

Once outside the two Wyoming men walked in silence down the street, a silence that was not broken until they were again on the *Oil City*. Slim took the first dose of medicine ordered by the doctor and sagged wearily on the edge of his bunk. Kansas sniffed the bottle judiciously.

"What does it taste like?" he asked.

"It ain't so strong as that Kickapoo Indian Sagwar. Say, Kansas, remember that Kickapoo Indian?"

"And his Blackfoot moccasins? I sure do."

"That was a show, wasn't it?" murmured Slim.

With veiled eyes the two looked back along the way they had come, the Rat River divide, the Mackenzie, Peace River valley and Edmonton, Lethbridge and the Border, Billings, and far down the lengthening perspective the Big Five Saloon at Bonanza.

"It sure seems longer than a year, if you should ask me," remarked Kansas.

Slim shivered miserably.

"Kick off your boots and roll into that blanket," ordered his partner. "I'm amblin' up to town to see what I can find out about hay and feed. Got to be ready to make a report to you before you pull out. It wouldn't hurt none if you was to get some sleep while

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I'm gone. You might dream about what you're goin' to do back in God's country when you get your quarter interest in them horses we got."

Slim pulled himself up on his elbow, his eyes wide.

"Kansas, you cross-eyed fool! You ain't plannin' to divide with me now that I've quit you just—"

"Shut up! and lay down!" rejoined his partner fiercely. "I ain't dividin' nothin'. I'm leavin' the cards as they lay. I'm used to 'em that way, and it would take more than a snufflin', yellow-livered cuss like you to make me change 'em."

"It ain't fair to the others, Kansas."

"What ain't fair?" Kansas was drawling now. "There wouldn't a been no horses for none of us if it hadn't a been for your bright ideas. And I'd like nothin' better than two minutes alone with any one of the crowd that thinks different. I'm willin' to bet considerable two minutes would be all he could stand."

With this as a silencer Kansas departed to consult with any of the Police who might be off-duty at the barracks. He found a friendly constable mending harness in the stable who listened with interest to the statement of his problem, but who immediately expressed it as his opinion that the question of hay or feed need not loom very large. He did not believe that horses could live to be brought through the mountains from Peace River.

"You don't know Wyomin' horses," was all Kansas had to say.

Hay, it seemed, was worth four hundred dollars a ton. It came from up the Klondike or the Stewart River. Men went after it in scows, poling them up-river and drifting down. It was sometimes a dangerous business and the men had to be paid eight or ten dollars a day for the entire time of their absence from Dawson. A merchant did not make much on it even at four hundred a ton.

"Look here," concluded the constable. "If you really think you're going to need a lot of hay next season, you ought to see Tom Chisholm. He will have to be sending out a party after some for that cow of his. If you could hire on with him, you could look over the grass-land situation for yourself, and you might be able to select your own source of supply."

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"Now," said Kansas, "you're beginning to show the sense that your mother always knew you had. I'll go see Tom Chisholm." And he went, leaving the constable grinning.

At Chisholm's saloon he found the usual crowd, and the proprietor at the rear end of the bar. He admitted that he was making up a crew to go after hay for the cow, and that he still needed a couple of men.

"What do you know about this sort of river work?"

"I come in over the Mackenzie-Porcupine route."

Tom Chisholm laughed.

"Then there isn't much I have to tell you. I'm having the scow towed to Stewart by the *Flora*. The meadows near the river's mouth were all cut off long ago, so I'm figuring on your having to go up beyond Independence Creek. It's a matter of forty miles or more. I expect you'll be gone about ten days. Wages ten a day."

"Suits me," said Kansas, and Chisholm took his name.

"The *Flora* is due to leave Tuesday, but you'd better keep an eye on her. Sometimes these boats slip away ahead of time if they fill up their space."

Kansas nodded and turned to leave, but a low voice at one of the tables near him brought him to a standstill. He could see only the speaker's back with the usual faded overall straps crossing it, but a phrase the man was using solved the puzzle of his identity.

"I don't like the looks of your deal," he was saying, "and as I told you when we begun I wasn't noways committed to you. I won't give you away, but I'm through."

"All right! All right!" returned the other sullenly. "But you're a fool."

The first speaker shrugged his shoulders, rose and with a hitch of his shoulder-straps turned around.

"Doc!" cried Kansas.

"Kansas, you old horsewrangler! You did make it, then! Where's the herd?"

"Not here yet, Doc. Packsaddle's bringin' 'em in next spring. Slim and me come on ahead to make arrangements for 'em, but Slim's in bad shape and the doctor's sendin' him home. You ain't

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free to join me, are you? Sounded like you was just bustin' up a pardnership."

"You got it all wrong, Kansas. That weren't no pardnership. I just been what you might call ridin' for that fellow for the season, but I don't like the outfit, and I've quit. Sure I'm with you. What are we doin' now?"

"We're makin' hay," said Kansas solemnly.

"My God!" ejaculated Doc.



Chapter XV

THE PREACHER INTERVENES

WONDER who this fellow Sylvester was," said Andy Bell. "I'll bet he wasn't a Company man."

"This doesn't look much like the other Hudson's Bay posts we've seen for a fact," admitted Shirley.

The two were sitting, each with a leg crooked comfortably around his saddle-horn, waiting for Packsaddle to return from the store where he had gone to consult with the factor. And they surveyed the shabby settlement of Dease River Landing with unconcealed disapproval. The old log building that was the Company store was unpainted and one of its wooden shutters, having lost a hinge, hung at a drunken angle. Various storehouses stood about in a disconnected way, turning their corners, sides or backs to the meandering path that did duty as a road, all faintly apologetic

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and down at the heels. Indian huts crowded under the very eaves of the factor's house lending their disorder even to its dooryard, for the wreck of a sled and several snowshoe-frames with the web-bings hopelessly broken leaned against the fence and some rusty traps hung from the palings. A few log cabins straggled along the bank of the Dease, and up McDame Creek some Klondikers' tents suggested a tatterdemalion suburb. Packsaddle's return from the store drew the attention of the waiting men from their surroundings.

"We're goin' to have to winter here," said the freighter. "Moodie's Patrol left day before yesterday and they issued orders no one was to try to follow them this year. Them Klondikers up there on the creek is just waitin' for a chance to get out. But it looks as if we'd landed plumb on our feet."

"How's that?" queried Andy Bell.

"The Company freighters all pulled out to the Klondike last spring. The factor says the Hudson's Bay people have a steamer workin' up and down on the Stikine River over the mountains there," Packsaddle gestured west, "and he knows it's been on the run this summer because all these Klondikers come in on her. So he's certain his supply is at the head of the pack-trail as usual, and he sure jumped at a chance to hire us to get it over here before the ice sets in. He was gettin' pretty near desperate when I showed up. Most of the Klondikers have give up the idea of seekin' for mines and are hittin' the trail for home and them as is goin' on wants to get a job of freightin' on the Teslin Lake route—that's another way into Dawson from the Stikine River—and they ain't interested a-tall in sashayin' back and forth between the river and Dease Lake. I said we was, and he cinched the bargain right there."

"What was your bargain, Packsaddle?" asked Shirley.

"He's to ranch our whole herd for us this winter if we get his stuff through. He says they have a good winter range where horses can take care of themselves till the crust on the snow gets heavy along in March, and he'll see we have hay to feed the bunch from them till spring."

"That's not a bad deal," chuckled Andy.

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"We start to-morrow mornin'. There ain't no time to lose. The Klondikers cleaned out the Company store some time ago and the outside traders turned over about all they had left to the Mounted Police. Pretty soon everybody's goin' to be runnin' short of grub. I made arrangements for you and Miss Anne to stay here, Preacher, while we're haulin' supplies. There's several vacant cabins by the river and the factor says you can take your pick."

Hearing her name the girl joined the group, coming down from a little knoll where she had been watching the changing light on the mountains east of the river through which their way had come. When all had been explained to her she laid her hand on her father's arm.

"We'd better go select that cabin right away. By the time these men get everything in order for their start to-morrow they'll be ready for a real meal."

"I expect you'll be glad to see the last of us, Miss Anne," remarked the freighter. "You'll have a chance for a rest you've sure been needin' for a long time."

With a wan smile the girl shook her head.

"I'd rather be working," she said. "I'm afraid when you go I shan't have enough to do." And shaking her pony's reins she trotted off toward the row of houses on the river bank just as Flapjack Charlie rode in with the rear-guard of loose horses.

The young cowpuncher made no effort to detain her, nor did he attempt to see her alone before the departure as she was dreading he might. He contented himself with the general farewell and even managed to be already in the saddle when the final greetings came so that he could take leave of her with a gesture and need not touch her hand.

To get the horses to the near end of the Cassiar Trail, as the factor called the road to the Stikine, was not the easiest matter. There was a Company steamer on Dease Lake, plying from Dease House at its head to Laketon, a point eighteen miles down its western side. Here freight which had been delivered to the steamer by the pack-trains was customarily loaded on York boats and paddled downstream to the settlement at Dease River Landing

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and to that other post at the mouth of the river on the Liard. The crews with the empty boats then made their way back to Laketon against the current. The Lower Dease was sluggish, but a short distance above the Landing swift water began, and the rapids made it impossible to consider transporting any load from Sylvester's to the lake by way of the river. The horsewranglers must therefore follow a dim, little-used track for nearly forty miles up the narrowing river valley and then for six miles more along the shore of the lake to the steamer's port of call. Most of the outgoing Klondikers joined the party but even with the extra help where wind-falls had blocked the path and with the horses under the lightest packs it was impossible to cover more than ten miles a day. The best part of a week was gone when the train had completed the crossing.

Laketon, once the center of a thriving mining district, clung forlornly to the wooded slope leading down to the lake, its rows of deserted cabins staring with blind eyes at the streets where the tufts of young evergreen and the slender poplar saplings were already timidly encroaching. A dejected store waited for the trickle of trade from the few old timers who preferred the meager certainty of proven holdings to the lure of later fields, more glittering and also more precarious. The horsewranglers peered through the open door. The interior was as empty as the street outside.

"There must a been some one doin' business here once," remarked Andy Bell, surveying the counters and the sparse offerings on the shelves. "But he's sure hidin' out on us now."

Beyond the store the mournful creak of a wooden sign swinging above another half-open door called their attention to the Gold Commissioner's office, and here they found the Commissioner, Mr. Porter, the storekeeper and a grizzled old prospector, named Thibert, ready to give them information. The steamer was due from Dease House that morning and they could camp anywhere along the bank that looked good to them. They might have difficulty in loading the horses for the water was unusually low this year. The Gold Commissioner and Henry Thibert walked out with them to look over the landing place. A scow was moored close in-

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shore to do duty as a wharf, and a plank, evidently a veteran of many seasons, sagged down to it at a sharp pitch from the path they were following. The bank itself offered no footway for it had been undercut by the ice.

"I don't suppose your horses are trained to walk a plank," mused the Gold Commissioner.

Packsaddle scanned the means of descent narrowly.

"Not that plank, they ain't," he decided. "They've been over one too many of them historic landmarks already. We better find somethin' else for 'em. Andy, you scout down that way and I'll take a look-see up along here, and the first one that finds a good slope leadin' down to the beach can holler."

The two mounted and rode off while Flapjack followed Thibert and the Commissioner down to the improvised wharf.

"It works pretty well, do you know," asserted Mr. Porter. "It's wide enough to put the steamer in fairly deep water, the decks make good landing-platforms, and the house provides shelter for waiting freight in case of storm. And as the water goes down we can keep shoving it out. Rather a neat idea, isn't it?"

Flapjack agreed.

"The captain will probably be using it to transport your horses," the Commissioner went on. "I only hope he brings it back soon. Handling freight is a nuisance without it."

"We're goin' to freight for the Company on the Cassiar Trail," volunteered Flapjack. "I expect he'll bring it back to use his own self."

"Well, that's good news!" declared Mr. Porter.

Henry Thibert had seated himself on a bollard and drawn a pipe from his pocket. He was now smoking and gazing out across the water through narrowed lids.

"I suppose you're headin' for da Klondike," he now put in, more by way of statement than as a question, and when Flapjack nodded he continued. "You're making de mistake. Yes, sir. Big mistake. Men been going t'rough Telegraph by hundreds for a year now, and dere must be t'ousands taking de trail over de pass' to de head of Yukon. Biggest strike in de worl' won' las' for all

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dose men. Everyt'ing's bound to be taken up long before you get dere. You better stay 'ere. Dere's gold all t'rough dese mountain', an' de groun' 'as only been scratch'."

Flapjack looked about him, at the shining lake, scarce wider than a river, winding between gently folded hills, at the far snow-peaks on the horizon.

"It wouldn't be a bad place to stay," he admitted, falling in for the time with the older man's humor.

"You bet dat's true," rejoined the other. "Dis a great country. I've seen some bad time' 'ere—my partner froze to deat' in 'seventy-four when we 'ad to mush out to de mout' of Stikine for supplies—but I still say dis a great country." He puffed at his pipe thoughtfully for a moment then added vehemently as if in response to some contradiction from Flapjack, "None better!"

A halloo from Packsaddle just then announced that he had found a passage to the beach for the horses, and almost immediately like a hoarse echo came the hoot of a steamer's whistle. By the time the two horsewranglers had returned to the landing the blunt nose and towering pilot house of an odd little craft had appeared around the bend in the valley some two miles south.

"Ain't she kinda tall for the length of her?" asked Andy Bell.

"She's built to push a scow," explained the Commissioner. "The wheelhouse has to be high to let the pilot see the water in front of the boat ahead."

They watched while the Company boat puffed asthmatically up the lake and came to a stop beside the scow. It seemed, with its faint air of dilapidation, a fit vessel to serve the deserted town. But there was nothing superannuated about the captain who jumped down to the scow as soon as he had rung off the engine. He looked thoroughly nautical in spite of the fact that the only sign of his calling was the blue cap he wore. The Wyoming men instinctively liked his frank weatherbeaten face and bright brown eyes. He read the letter from the factor at Sylvester's which Packsaddle presented and welcomed the horsewranglers heartily.

"It was time some one took hold of that freighting," he said. "I

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was beginning to be afraid the folks in there would starve to death this winter. How many horses have you here?"

"Fifty-four," answered Packsaddle promptly, "countin' saddle stock."

"Fifty-four!" exclaimed the Captain. "Man, go up there and count them again. The Company hasn't half that many horses if they were all rounded up and brought here."

"These ain't Company horses. They're ours."

"Yours! Where did you ever collect fifty-four horses in this country!"

"We didn't collect 'em here. We drove 'em in from Wyomin'. In the States, you know."

The Captain stared, speechless, and Packsaddle felt it necessary to explain further.

"We're takin' 'em to the Klondike next spring, but we have to winter here, so we're freightin' for the Company to pay for their ranchin'."

The Captain had found his voice.

"You brought them from the States and you're taking them to the Klondike! Well, since you've got this far you'll probably go the rest of the way. Sir, I want to shake hands with you. I like a man of nerve."

Two trips of the steamer and scow were necessary to carry all the horses to Dease House, Packsaddle and Andy accompanying the first load, and Flapjack bringing up the second. It was early in the morning of September first when the boat set out on the second trip. The young cowpuncher, having seen his charges safely fastened in the house on the scow, sat on the front deck with his shoulders braced against the gate that held the horses in place. The morning air was cold and in spite of having his mackinaw buttoned to his neck and his hands rammed deep in its pockets, he shivered occasionally. The warmth of the horses behind him felt good upon his back.

The steamer pushed the scow smoothly through the water, and the man surveyed the changing scene with somber eyes. Poignantly he missed the girl who was not seeing it with him and the ethereal

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beauty of the mist on the still water, the dancing gold of the aspens and the bronze fire of the rosebushes contrasting with the dark evergreens on the hillsides above the fog were to him so many stabs of pain. Wearily his mind tested again the strength of the trap which Mrs. Shirley's death had set for him and Anne, and for the thousandth time he wondered whether even time and this separation would suffice to set them free.

"God!" he said aloud, and then again, "God!" There was nothing of profanity in the low word.

Dease House, he found to his surprise, was not a house at all but a cluster of cabins at the lake's end. An old Hudson's Bay post had been turned to the uses of a forwarding depot. Two of the fur warehouses were stocked with hay and feed for the Company's pack-trains and the keys to these had been turned over to Packsaddle. A third stood open to provide shelter for such parties on the trail as might have to wait for the steamer, and there was a padlocked cabin where the Captain explained freight could be stored if he should happen to be up at Laketon when the train returned.

"You won't want to waste time waiting for me," he told the Wyoming men, "for even with fifty-four horses it's going to be a rush to get all the freight that's probably lying at Glenora for you up here before the ice makes on the lake. Luckily you have a good trail and an easy portage."

They soon found out that the Captain's description was accurate. The Cassiar Trail had been a well-traveled road and although the roadhouses that had flourished along it when the Cassiar mines were in their heyday were now empty and deserted, the trail had been kept up and the bridges were all in good condition.

"I expect this was the sorta road Slim was lookin' to find from Edmonton to Dawson," observed Flapjack to Packsaddle at their first camp. "Remember that guide-book of his? 'Routes have been in use by the Hudson's Bay Company for years and sportsmen travel at all seasons of the year for pleasure.' We'll tell him we found one piece of it anyways."

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"And of course we must be mistook in thinkin' it leads out to the coast instead of in to Dawson," drawled the old freighter.

"Sure!" said Andy Bell. "That guide-book couldn't be wrong."

The grade was so gradual they did not know when they crossed the Divide. The woods merely grew thinner and they suddenly became aware that a stream they were following was flowing west. They really needed the tracks of moose and mountain sheep around the waterholes to prove they were in high country. There were great stretches of meadow-land with the rounded mountains watching from a distance, and occasional swampy places.

"But none of 'em ain't what you'd call a muskeg," Andy Bell told the Klondikers.

After forty miles of travel over grassy country and flats where the light shadows of spruce fell across the road, the yellow leaves of the poplars rustled underfoot and the creek they were following scoured an ever-deepening valley for itself, they came to the deep-cut gorge of the Tuya River, which the Klondikers told them was a fork of the Stikine and which they had prophesied would present grave difficulties for loaded animals. But to the wilderness rangers the crossing of the canyon by a well-marked trail was a simple matter.

"If that's the worst we're goin' to meet on this road," remarked Packsaddle as the last horse in the train jerked himself up over the rim onto the dry open bench again, "we ain't got no kick a-tall."

The Klondikers declared there was another canyon about six miles farther on, where the Tahltan came in from the north, but this obstacle proved no more serious than the first, and the horsewranglers camped just beyond the big Indian village encouraged by the knowledge that they were on the edge of the Stikine settlements. At Telegraph Creek the trail branched off that led to Atlin and Teslin lakes, and at the little town of Telegraph down on the bank of the river, which here ran deep in a narrow valley, those Klondikers who still had hopes of reaching the land of gold deserted the train. There were two or three traders in Telegraph and those would-be miners whose equipment was ex-

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hausted hoped for a job freighting on the northern trail. Packsaddle and his partners, however, were glad to leave the place behind them. It seemed so gloomy in the perpetual shadow of the river gorge and perhaps the sight of the outfitting Klondikers, excited and hopeful, brought back too vividly their own carefree start a year before. But they could not escape from Klondikers now for the trail was lined with their weird outfits.

"I'd plumb forgot what fools we was," murmured Flapjack. "Look at them engines that party is packin'? How far do you think they'll get them?"

"It would be liberal to give them a week," was Andy's verdict. "But I'll bet you they throw 'em away before they cross the first fifty mile line."

"Boys," exclaimed Packsaddle in an anxious tone, "do you see what I see?"

The other two followed the direction of his pointing finger and made out a procession of men with loaded wheelbarrows moving briskly up the trail. They did not look like Klondikers and it developed that they were freighters, engaged to transport the gold-seekers' outfits from Glenora to Atlin Lake. They stopped to exchange professional gossip with the pack-train men.

"This'll be our last trip with the barrows," declared the leader, "and I can't say I'm sorry. In the winter we're going to use sleds."

"Well, I'll be damned!" declared Packsaddle weakly, when they had gone on. He sounded breathless. "Freightin' with a wheelbarrow, by all that's holy!"

"Kansas and Slim had the right idea," remarked Andy. "They sure need horses in this north country."

At Glenora the office of the Hudson's Bay Company, a line of empty cabins and the Mining Recorder's shack evidently dated back to the time of the Cassiar stampede, but several flimsy hotels had been put up to accommodate the opulent of the present rush and the white tents of over a thousand Klondikers crowded the space between the river and the western bluff. The crowds among the tents and along the river bank could be easily divided into two recognizable streams. By far the greater portion were eager new-

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comers, excited and ignorant, but with them was an element which, although smaller in numbers, was hardly less vociferous, the survivors of a bitter experience of the trail who had managed to beat their way back to the river and who were awaiting the steamers that might take them home. Into the ranks of these disappointed ones the few men who still accompanied the freighters disappeared.

The Company clerk greeted the horsewranglers with enthusiasm and when he saw the length of the pack-train he emitted a whoop of joy.

"I have a warehouse jammed full of stuff for you," he announced, "and with all these horses you may be able to get it to the lake before the freeze. There's a good bit here for the 'outsiders' too, but of course the Company's freight goes first."

When Packsaddle had seen the warehouse he gave vent to a low whistle. Then he called his partners in conference and together they worked out a method of using the strength of the range horses to the utmost. They made the separate packs as heavy as they dared, and by unbroken drives of fifteen miles each day they were able to cross the trail in five days and could give their animals two days' rest each week. Hudson's Bay goods were easy to pack, having been made up in sixty or a hundred pound bales which were assembled without difficulty, and the fine weather lasting late that fall, it was possible to move the last of the Company freight on the third trip and to land it along with a few bales for the "outsiders" at Dease House on October eighth.

The horsewranglers had expected to go into camp with this load to wait for true winter and solid going on lake and river, but to their surprise they found the Captain waiting for them.

"I never saw such a fall," he declared. "Ice only just beginning to form. I thought I'd try to get one more load down for you. A crew of scowmen from Sylvester's are at Laketon, and they say the river is still open. They ought to be able to get this freight through, but if they fail they'll cache it somewhere along the river and you can pick it up when you bring the horses down on the ice. They'll set up the Company flag over the cache."

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"That's fine," said Packsaddle. "Now, boys, what do you say we go back to Glenora and pick up what's left in that warehouse? It won't make no more than half packs for the horses and we can take it at least as far as the boatmen's cache, if they have to make a cache. I expect the outsiders could manage to rustle it the rest of the way with dogs if they had it to do."

"I never was one to starve natives if it could be helped," remarked Andy Bell. "Let alone white men."

"And women," put in Flapjack. "When do we start?"

The fourth and last trip on the Cassiar Trail was made at leisure. The Klondikers were gone, for the last boats had dropped downstream weeks before and the frenzied goldseekers were far out on the inhospitable northern route. At the Indian village of Tahltan the tump-lines and straps of the freighter had been laid aside, traps were being overhauled and new webbing provided for snowshoe frames. The white traders at Glenora and Telegraph Creek had time on their hands, leisure to smoke and talk. Old man Hyland in particular spun fine yarns of hunting expeditions made in the early days by the fur traders of the Dease Lake country who regularly journeyed out to the Tanzilla River every fall to lay in their winter supply of meat.

"That's the Tanzilla, that creek you start following about five miles after you leave the lake. Funny, isn't it, the difference a few miles makes? There usually has been plenty of game this side of that Divide, but they always seem to be running short of meat on the inside."

It was a chance remark, but it led the horsewranglers to ponder the bearing this situation might have on their winter plans. They discussed the news anxiously around their camp-fire that night, and before leaving Telegraph on the return trip they had persuaded Hyland to organize a hunt. Packsaddle remained at Dease Lake to feed and care for the horses, but the two younger men joined the trader at the agreed meeting-place on the Tanzilla. Hyland had brought along the Mining Recorder with his Indian wife and her relations to be sure of making a large kill, and two weeks in the mountains were successful for the freighters as well as for the clan.

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Frozen quarters of moose and mountain-sheep made part of the loads which the pack-train carried when the ice was pronounced thick enough early in December for the start to Sylvester's. Snowflakes were falling lazily from the upper air as the horses moved out on the lake, the first real snow of the season, growing thicker as the day waned and the wind began to rise.

The same wind whined eerily that night about the Shirleys' cabin at Sylvester's Upper Post, but it was not the wind that had wakened the Preacher. He lay in the darkness listening for that other sound until it came again, the smothered weeping from Anne's room. Cautiously he pulled himself out of his bunk, thrust his legs into his trousers and his feet into his soft skin boots. The cabin was bitter cold and utterly silent now that he had begun to stir. He crossed the creaking floor and kicked the fire to life, heaping on fresh logs. It was not the first time he had heard Anne crying in the night, and he felt that something must be done. He lit his pipe and puffed at it meditatively until the blaze that he had kindled had begun to temper the air in the room. Then he knocked on his daughter's door. A low word answered him. He opened the door for a narrow space and spoke in a matter-of-fact voice.

"I feel like talking to you. It's probably cold in there, but I have a fire here. Won't you wrap up in a blanket and come out?"

He dragged their one barrel armchair to the fire and sat in such a position that Anne could take a place on the bearskin at his feet without revealing her tear-stained face. When he had settled her blanket about her he allowed his hand to remain on her shoulder, and in silence they watched the fire together. The low whine of the wind rose to a moan and he felt the girl's shudder beneath his hand.

"When the wind cries like that, it's hard not to hear voices," he said, still in his matter-of-fact tone.

Anne lifted her head, tense with attention, but she did not look at him.

"Were you thinking of Mother just now?"

Silently the girl nodded, and he considered a while before he spoke again.

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"Heaven knows we can't help missing her, you and I. But, Anne dear, we must think of the joy of the Life to which she has gone. We would not wish her back in this—"

"Oh, wouldn't we? Wouldn't we?" Wildly the girl turned on him, her hands outstretched and trembling. "I was just thinking in there before you called that I would give anything, everything in the world, if I could have her back for five minutes, less that five minutes—so that I could talk to her."

Her father searched the dark eyes in which lurked a despair bordering on madness, and cautiously he felt his way.

"There is something you would want her to understand?"

Again Anne nodded. She was struggling for self-control and dared not trust her voice.

"Then why don't you tell her?" asked the Preacher.

"Tell her?" Her tense tone was agony.

"Little daughter," said her father gently, "where do you think your mother is?"

"In Heaven."

"And where is Heaven?"

Anne looked about bewildered.

"I don't know," she said slowly.

"Neither do I. Nor does any one, though a number of people talk as if they did. But we have a record, that you and I both believe, of One who came back for a space through the gates of death. On the Resurrection morning He first sought out the women who loved Him and mourned for Him. And then He sent a message especially to Peter showing He understood and forgave that hasty denial in the High Priest's courtyard. 'Tell my disciples and Peter . . .' He said. If all this has any general meaning, as we Christians facing the enigma of the great separation hold, then, dear, Mother is in this room now, more anxious to hear than you are to speak. Can't you believe this and tell her what you want her to understand?"

Anne's tortured eyes were on her father's face. Now they shifted to the dark shadows behind him.

"I—don't know," she said again. "I don't—know."

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"Then if that is hard to believe, can't you tell me? She is listening and will hear it too."

He watched her while she considered this.

"You can't hate me more than I hate myself," was her conclusion, and with white lips she went on: "Mother and I were talking up there on the top of the bank while you were busy at the ford, and she said something that made me very angry. I told her that I would do what I was planning to do and that I didn't care what she said. Then I put my horse down the bank as fast as I could to get away from her. She called me but I only went faster. She started after me still calling and not looking where she was going. Then I heard her start to fall. I rushed back but she was dead, and she died thinking I didn't care what she said. I can't ever tell her now that I didn't mean it. Oh, don't think I haven't tried! I've called and called to her. You say the dead are listening. How can you know that when they never answer?"

"Anne," again her father was feeling his way, "suppose Mother had not been killed by that fall, but had just been badly shaken up, so that when you got back to her she could have opened her eyes, what would have happened then?"

"Oh, then it would have been all right. I could have told her and it would have been—all right."

"What makes you think that?"

"Why, Mother always understood!"

The girl's eyes were raised to his in astonishment at the question, and as he met them he smiled. Slowly under his silent smile, the amazement in her strained face gave place to a dawning of sanity.

"You mean—" she whispered.

"Of course," was his answer. "If she had really believed that you did not care she would not have called, she certainly would never have hurried after you. She knew the impulsive speech for what it was and had forgiven it before she started down the bank. There! There!" For Anne had flung herself in his arms and was clinging to him with wild sobs shaking her, the pent-up flood of months of anguish tearing through the gateway of the release he

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had opened to her. He waited until she grew still and then he said quietly, "You see, she did hear you and she has answered you."

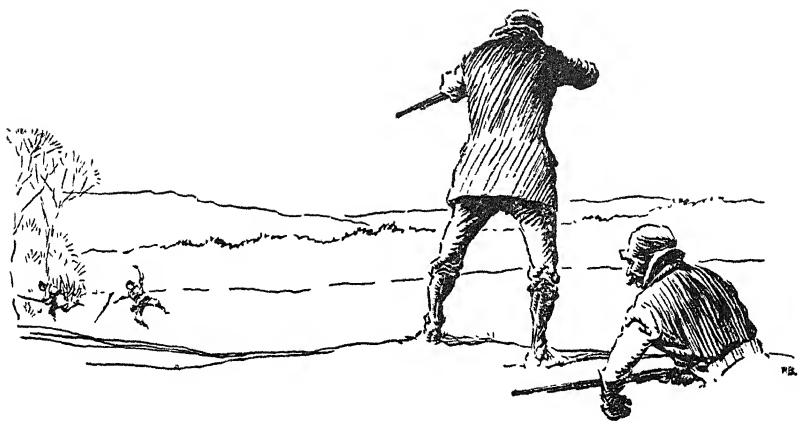
The head pillowed against his shoulder nodded.

"So all you have to do now is to pick up your life again and live it as you know she would want."

Gently Anne disengaged herself and sat up where she could look into the fire.

"Yes," she said soberly, "that's all."

And she straightened her thin shoulders with an odd gesture as if she were assuming a load.



Chapter XVI

DEATH AGAIN TAKES A HAND

THE Arctic winter dragged its interminable length through the Dease Lake country. At Sylvester's Upper Post it seemed to be ushered in by the returning pack-train that appeared on the heels of the first storm, wraith-like animals attended by wind-driven snow, with frost rings around their eyes and icicles hanging from the whiskers on their muzzles. Out of the packs on their backs came a great store of meat which was unloaded at the Company store; the rest of the freight was claimed by the independent traders. Then as silently as they had come the range horses departed into the whirling drifts of another storm. This time they were following Indian guides assigned by the Casca chief to lead the horsewranglers to the grassy country in the lee of the Horse Ranch Mountains.

"It ain't a bad place for horses," Packsaddle told Mr. Shirley on his return. "Plenty of grass. Lakes too, so they can't run short of water. And mountain valleys just above the meadows where they can find shelter in the storms. They ought to come through all right."

Flapjack's quick eyes saw a subtle difference in Anne. She still held herself in as if with an iron curb, but the dullness of despair was gone from her face, and something had modified her anguished

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shrinking from his presence. He soon found that she could admit him to the friendship she accorded Andy and Packsaddle, if he would make no attempt to see her alone. But if encouraged by this attitude he even let a hint of tenderness color his voice, a panic fear seemed to sweep her beyond his reach, and he must spend patient days recovering lost ground. There were definite and narrow limits to the intimacy she offered, limits that made the situation often one of torture for him, but he knew his only hope lay in accepting the terms that were silently imposed. He joined the general gatherings and met her with a casual air that successfully hid the storming emotions within. When the masquerade grew too difficult to maintain, he strapped on snowshoes, flung his blanket roll over his shoulder and struck out into the winter woods, fighting wind and snow and cold for days if necessary until fatigue could bring quietness again.

On one of these excursions he came upon an Indian tending a line of traps. The man straightened up at his approach and for a long moment the two stood at gaze. Flapjack saw a lean, brown man who was no longer young, for the heavy black locks that hung before his ears were streaked with gray, but whose still, watching eyes shone with a serenity that made his whole face luminous. Whatever of misery there was in the boy's heart leaped to meet this look. Slowly the Indian smiled and stepped forward with extended hand. With a gesture as simple the young cowpuncher reached out his own and by a clasp friendship was sealed. So deep was Flapjack's sudden sense of kinship with this brown stranger that there seemed nothing odd in the ceremony. He fell in step beside the other and together they visited the traps. When night came they camped in the same hollow and over the fire extended their knowledge of each other by means of the few words they had in common.

Secatz came from the north, near the Liard, Flapjack learned, but he always had a trap-line in these mountains back of the Upper Post. The cowpuncher's presence was harder to explain. Flapjack drew a map in the snow, but his river-names soon passed beyond the bounds of the Indian's recognition. Secatz gathered, however, that his friend had come from far away to the south

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and east. He was not hunting in the woods, nor trapping. Just walking through. Secatz pondered this, and then he smiled again his slow, understanding smile.

"It is good," he said. "Heart sad, then woods talk."

And Flapjack was willing to leave it at that.

It was the first of many meetings, for whenever he fled from the settlement he now pushed up through the hills to where the Indian was working. There was something about this brown man with the quiet eyes, as there was about the still immensity of the frozen world, that cooled the fever of impatience that tormented him. He had, then, a real sense of loss when he found shortly after the turn of the year that Secatz had gone. The traps had been taken up. Evidently the Indian had another place for taking fur in the deepest winter months and diligent searching through the hills failed to reveal where it might be.

Gradually, silently the snow had piled higher, covering the fence by the factor's house at the post, setting jaunty cocked hats on the storehouses. It withdrew from the walls of the various buildings where the wind leaping down from the roofs had hollowed it out, carving it into the hanging crests of waves that never broke. Patiently it filled in and smoothed over the crooked paths from house to house, only to have them trampled out afresh. Then as the hours of sunlight lengthened, as the twilight of dawn came earlier and the afterglow lingered longer on the slopes of Sylvester Peak across the river, the soft surface of the snow grew dense and formed a crust that thickened with the passing of each bitter night. The Indian hunters straggled off in parties to take their year's supply of moose, and the horsewranglers mushed through the snow to the mountains once a week to spread the hay for their wintering herd.

By mid-afternoon of one such trip, their task being done, Flapjack tossed the forks onto the hay-mow in the Company's warehouse, Andy shoved the door shut and Packsaddle set the heavy fastening bar in place. The three men looked over their shoulders at the nearest mound of fodder where a number of their charges were already pawing and snuffling.

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"Fat as kittens, ain't they?" observed Andy Bell with satisfaction.

"It would take a worse winter than this to kill Wyomin' range horses," boasted Packsaddle.

"Don't seem to me like it's as cold here as it was around Lesser Slave Lake last year," said Flapjack. "Funny, too. We must be lots further north."

"Of course, the fact that we ain't been campin' out in it this year ain't influenced your feelin's none," drawled Packsaddle.

"I have camped out in it," rejoined Flapjack quickly, "and it ain't so cold."

The three considered this mystery of climate solemnly. All at once one of the feeding horses raised his head, a wisp of hay swinging from his mouth, his ears pricked attentively. The wind was rising with a low, menacing whine.

"That Roman Nose can always smell a storm," declared Flapjack with a laugh.

"Come on, boys," said Packsaddle, "we're twenty-five miles from home."

He led the way briskly around the warehouse and down toward the sheltered hollow where they had left the dog-team. Suddenly with an anguished yell the old freighter broke into a run. A glance showed the other two the cause of his trouble and they pounded after him. On their arrival at the feeding-ground a few hours before they had thrown harness, snowshoes and their other equipment on the high platform of an old cache to get them out of the reach of the dogs. Some carelessness in stowing, aggravated by the rising wind had caused whip-lash or dog-trace to sag over the edge of the platform and by jumping for it the dogs had managed to pull a fair part of the pile to the ground where they now crowded over it in a snarling mass. At the yells of the oncoming men the older and experienced culprits fled, but one young dog though he fastened anxious eyes on his masters still chewed hopefully at a section of harness. Upon him Packsaddle pounced, seizing for a weapon as he approached the empty frame of a snowshoe from which hung a few wet shreds of webbing.

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"Eat up my snowshoes, will you?" he howled. "I'll teach you, you misbegotten son of a—"

"Hold on! Hold on!" drawled Andy Bell. "If you're goin' to give that animile a cuss-name, Packsaddle, you'll have to think up a new one. The one you're startin' out on don't fit this case."

"He probably knows his mother was a female dawg without your tellin' him," admonished Flapjack sadly.

"Look around, you hyenas, and you'll sure laugh outa the other end of your mouths," was Packsaddle's vindictive retort. "Ain't that your gun-case all chawed up behind you there, Flapjack? And Andy, what's them?"

With a well-directed kick he landed the mangled cuffs of a pair of gauntlets at the Montana man's feet. The gloves had been entirely eaten off. This move had its desired effect, for his companions' voices rose in curses as fervent as his own, as each discovered a personal loss. But the essential harness had suffered no serious harm, and they were able presently to drive in the listening circle of dogs and to make them fast to the traces.

"It ain't no man's job a-tall," grumbled Packsaddle, holding a squirming beast on its back between his knees while he adjusted the buckskin stockings that would protect its feet from the cutting of the crust. "Hog-tyin' a dawg!" He snorted in disgust. "Nor drivin' 'em neither!"

"Give me a horse every time," asserted Andy Bell.

"You bet!" Flapjack chimed in.

"Or a mule," concluded the freighter.

Nevertheless, they continued to use the dogs to take them back and forth between the post and the Horse Ranch Mountains, these weekly trips being their only regular occupation. Occasionally they varied the monotony of the winter by hunting with the Indians, for this proved to be one of the winters when game had migrated elsewhere and no meat had been brought into the camp since the return of the pack-train in the fall. At Sylvester's Upper Post, although the outlook was serious, there was no great pressure of necessity. The Casca were not enthusiastic hunters, and since there was meat enough in the Company storehouse to provide a slim ra-

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tion through the spring, they saw no reason to make unusual efforts. If left to themselves they might not even have organized the occasional desultory hunt to which the white men spurred them. The best time to take moose was on the day of a gale when the wind blew the snow into the animals' big ears and gave the hunters a handicap. But that was a bad day for men to be away from shelter. What was the use of risking one's life if not even a track was to be found? In the Indian villages along the Liard women and children were starving, but even the hunters from these camps reported that they saw no moose-signs in any of the usual haunts, and shot only an occasional stringy old bull as the reward for weeks of tracking. The Dease River Indians lacking the spur of starvation found nothing. They viewed the situation with philosophy. In the summer there would be canned meat in the Company store and canned meat was good, they said.

"They sure ain't got much ambition!" was the contemptuous judgment of the horsewranglers.

Spring swept swiftly over the valley. One night the sun set on a wintry world, the next dawn came with a soft light wind, and the tinkle and drip of melting snow became a rush of water before the day was done. Great pools spread out on the ice of the river and honeycombed its surface, but the heavy structure of the winter months could not give way at once. A week had passed, and the air was clamorous with the calls of wild geese and ducks, the big lavender anemones were in bloom at the edge of the snow-banks, before the ice went out.

Seated on the step before her cabin door Anne for the second time watched the pageant of the break-up of a northern river, the booming crash that broke the ice, the slow majestic rise on the bosom of the flood, the almost imperceptible start downstream, the quickening pace, the reeling waltz of the passing ice, the slowing down, the staggering to a pause, the tortured tangle of the jam breaking at last under the intolerable weight of the flood behind; and as she watched she saw again the break-up of the Peace when her mother had been by her side. She needed no reminder, but each time as she rose to take up some task laid by, she made that odd

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gesture as if squaring her shoulders to a burden that taxed her strength.

The restlessness of spring disturbed her, driving her out to long hours in the woods alone. The day was soon coming, she told herself, when the march would be taken up again, and she could no longer avoid the others. So she phrased her thought, never admitting even to herself that it was Flapjack alone whose company she feared. She fortified herself with solitude and with living again in her memories of her mother, thus preparing herself for whatever ordeal might lie ahead. Her father saw her set out on these excursions with anxiety and secretly studied her face on each return. What he thought he found there did not relieve his uneasiness, but he knew she was no longer crying at night and with this he forced himself to be content, trusting to time to heal her trouble. He felt there was nothing more he could add to what he had already said.

About the middle of May Packsaddle made ready, with Andy and Flapjack, for the last journey to the Horse Ranch Mountains. Each man took his blankets and a pack this time, as the herd was to be rounded up and brought down to the post. Mr. Shirley would have gone with them but Packsaddle refused his offer.

"This ain't the kinda ridin' you're used to, Preacher," he said. "And anyways three of us is more than enough to haze that bunch in. We fed 'em so much this spring that it's more than likely they'll be glad to see us comin'."

And indeed they had no trouble in capturing the saddle horses that they found grazing near the old feeding-ground. Each man caught his own mount, and Roman Nose, Lovell's pony and the little brown horse that the Preacher rode were brought in and hobbled for a second string, before camp was made for the night. With the dawn the next day the work for the round-up of the rest of the herd began. The morning was spent in the construction of a rope and brush corral among the cottonwoods by a little creek just below the Company barn. A tempting amount of hay was thrown down in the enclosure and the three extra horses loosed from their hobbles were turned into it.

"It don't do no harm to have a Committee of Welcome ready

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for them range horses," remarked Packsaddle as he cast a satisfied glance over his final arrangements. "They'll be more willin' to stay when we get 'em drove in."

Then the three rode out to locate the herd. They worked out in a widening circle from their corral and by nightfall had brought in thirty head including Packsaddle's mare with her faithful mules. They had found a place where a snowslide had caught four of the horses at the head of a box canyon in which they had evidently sought shelter from a storm. They lay where they had fallen, one upon the other, a noisome mass of hide and bones thinly covered by the litter of the slide. A skeleton had also been located, scattered over the top of a hill where wolves had feasted.

"There ought to be about fifteen more of 'em," Packsaddle remarked over their evening camp-fire. "Alive or dead. We turned in fifty-six countin' the saddle stock, didn't we?"

The others agreed on his tally, but the next day's careful skirmishing yielded only eight. The last of these, however, had been found far at the north end of the range, when approaching night made it too dark for further searching, and the men trotted back to camp hazing their last find before them, full of confidence that the rest of the herd was undoubtedly somewhere in those northern meadows. That day had added two more to the list of those that had succumbed to wolves, but such a toll for a herd of this size was light and the horsewranglers were correspondingly cheerful.

Starting from camp before daylight they were able to take up the search before the sun was high. Flapjack was in the lead as they rode along by the side of a stream through just such a place as a range horse would choose for water, shade and freedom from flies. Suddenly the young cowpuncher reined in his horse with an exclamation. He was transfixed, staring at the ground at his feet. The other two spurred to his side and looked down at a gruesome sight, the grinning head of a horse with sunken eyeholes, and the four hoofs. Nothing more.

Andy spoke for them all in a low voice.

"That ain't the work of wolves," he said.

Grimly the three dismounted and examined the hoofs.

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"Cut with a knife," announced Packsaddle in the same muffled tone.

Cautiously now they rode on. A short way up the stream they came on the heads of three more horses, lying together, fresher these, with the stench of recent decay. Near the top of the gulch they found the blackened circle of a camp-fire and the ashes were warm. Around it were the moccasin tracks of two men. Not a word was spoken now, but the three horsewranglers moved as one. Each dismounted and tethered his horse, each drew his rifle from his saddle-scabbard and saw to the loading. Then with his eyes on the ground Packsaddle took the lead. With the stealth of Indians, the others followed. A shot over the ridge to the right set them running, but still silently, up its nearer side. Just below the summit they dropped to the ground and crawled to the crest. In the hollow below them two Indians were stooping over the body of a horse. One held a rifle in his hand.

With a hoarse yell Packsaddle rose to his feet.

"You damn horse killer," he shouted even as his rifle spoke.

The Indians looked up at the sound and the one with the rifle half wheeled before he fell. The other turned and dashed away between the trees. The three white men swooped down the hill after him, their rifles blazing as they ran, but the Indian had the start and a knowledge of the country. For an hour they circled through the timber on the line of his escape without picking up his trail until Packsaddle brought them to a halt.

"Boys," he said dully, "he's got away on us, and we better go back and move the rest of the herd out of here. There ain't nothin' to keep us from goin' back to the post now we know where them five horses is."

The others nodded silently and all three returned to where their horses were tied. By unspoken agreement they climbed out of the little valley and followed the line of the stream along its upper bench. There was no need to pass those piles of bones again and they wished to put the whole unpleasant occurrence out of their minds. A crime had been discovered and the chief culprit had paid the penalty demanded by their plainsman's code. For them the in-

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cident was now closed. So they rode briskly and talked of preparations for the journey ahead.

Pads and collars would need to be freshly stuffed before they would be fit for use again after the long winter. The three loaded enough hay on the horses' backs to serve for this purpose, before they set out for the post, and Anne remade this part of the harness while the men saw to the replenishment of ropes, halters and girths. From the factor they learned what they could of the road ahead. There was a regular trail from Sylvester's Upper Post to the Lower Post on the Liard and the factor agreed to have a boat waiting to facilitate the transport of their outfit over the two crossings of the Dease, twenty-five and sixty miles below the settlement.

"There's no wood suitable for rafting at either place," he said, "so you'll need a boat. Simpson, the factor at the Lower Post, will see you get your stuff over the Liard. This trail ends there, since that traverse from the Liard to the Pelly—it's the Pelly you hit over in the Yukon Basin, you know—that traverse has not been used by the Company for over thirty years. The earliest traders always traveled by water, so they never made a trail. Beyond the Lower Post you'll have to follow whatever cuttings the Police made last fall and you'll be surprised how faint they are after one winter's snow and a few weeks' growing this spring. I expect you'll have to look sharp in places where there were no trees to be felled, if you want to find it."

About the first of June the pack-train strung out along McDame Creek, on a "Hudson's Bay start" as far as Bulkley's store, where they made an early camp among the deserted cabins of the Cassiar mining boom.

"How about sleepin' in one of them buildin's, Miss Anne?" queried Packsaddle. "It may be your last chance at a roof till we get to Dawson."

The girl shook her head.

"I might as well begin to get used to the tent again. Those cabins are too full of ghosts—and other things."

"Probably you're right," agreed the freighter, "since you mention 'other things,' particular."

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She lay long awake that night, until the late-rising moon cast shadows on her tent, listening to the stir and stamp of the feeding horses, and the far-off wild call of a wolf. It seemed almost to meet her inner need, this being once more in the open with the good earth unyielding beneath her blankets and night-sounds murmurous in her ears. Almost, but not entirely. And why must her thoughts stray to Flapjack on his horse somewhere in the moonlight, guarding the herd that would have escaped along the trail to their mountain range? Had he found more of healing in the winter woods than she in this night of spring? He had always returned from his wanderings with quiet eyes. And so thinking of him she drowsed at last, drifting away from the puzzle of pain and peace.

The trail turned away from the creek above the deserted Town, skirting the west side of a chain of little lakes, holding northward across burned country where the young raspberries spread like a green carpet staked down by the blackened trunks of trees, until at evening a line of saskatoon bushes like mounds of snow drew nearer and nearer through the dusk, marking the edge of the high cut-bank of the Dease. The horsewranglers had reached the Crossing. A hundred feet below the river lay, and a Company boat was moored beneath the bank according to the factor's promise. The travelers could make out the dull glow of the boatmen's camp-fire underneath the trees, but they chose to spend the night above the bank for the sake of pasture for the horses.

With the help of the Company's boatmen it was an easy matter the next day to take the baggage over to the low-lying northern bank of the river, but the crossing by the horses consumed hours. The water was deep beneath the cut-bank and cold as melting snow. None of the animals brought down the zigzag trail were willing of their own accord to make the plunge. They squealed and reared, or just balked and shivered and if they were crowded off the bank into the stream they scrambled back again, snorting and terrified, at the nearest spot where they could get a footing. Cross they would not. It was necessary for the boat to ply back and forth across the hundred yard stretch with a man in the stern leading two horses at a time. Three or four of the more venture-

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some ones would follow these two led swimmers, but no great numbers would take to the river until the larger part of the herd was over; then at last the rest plunged in, fear of being left behind overcoming their terror of the icy stream.

Beyond the first crossing the way led out across the country for fifteen miles or more leaving the river to describe a great loop to the west. The land was drenched like some primal plain emerging from a flood. Water filled every depression. There were shallow pools with reedy edges, there were lakes with wooded islands on their breasts, again there were potholes scarce large enough for a horse to use as a drinking place, and from every sheet of water mosquitoes rose in vindictive swarms to make the day vexatious and night a sleepless torment. Marsh grass everywhere grew rank and coarse, and the trail squelched and shook beneath the horses' feet as if a thin layer of vegetation were floating on unfathomed depths of ooze. Yet when the trail came down on the Dease once more, opposite where the Blue River emptied into it, the shallow valley was drier than the watery plain above. Here again they found the Company boatmen waiting and with their assistance crossed to the western bank.

It was a relief to camp on dry ground and to travel along the valley through the timber with the crooked river curving to meet the trail now and again. The horses could make better time here and on the fifth day after leaving the Upper Post the party climbed a low ridge near the mouth of the river and saw before them the muddy yellow expanse of the Liard, with the clustered low log buildings of the Lower Post on the far side a few miles up the stream.

"This ain't so bad, ninety-five miles in five days!" Packsaddle's voice was exultant as he spurred his mare to the edge of the bank where he might scan the river.

The others lined up at his side. The river was perhaps three times as wide as the Dease and swifter, but he pointed out that the opposite bank as far as could be seen was easy of access from the water.

"With this current we're likely to bring up quite a bit downstream," he explained, "and it's good to know we can get out any-

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where. We'll unload everythin' right here, and, Preacher, we'll ask you and Miss Anne to drive them horses into the river while we try to swim 'em across. Cut yourselves some good heavy switches, so you can larrup 'em if they hangs back. We're sure goin' to discover if they objects to crossin' any rivers in eighteen-ninety-nine or if they just felt ornery about the first ones."

But the horses had evidently accepted the inevitable and splashed into the water resolutely on the heels of the bareback riders, swimming strongly with outstretched necks when they found themselves beyond their depth. Swept along by the current they yet edged across little by little until the watchers saw them climbing up through the shallows to the further shore.

One of the riders detached himself from the other two to make off in the direction of the Hudson's Bay post, whence groups of men were already emerging to greet the newcomers. These all turned back together to the buildings and presently reappeared with a large boat which they carried down to launch on the river.

"I had been wondering," remarked the Preacher to his daughter as the boat was rowed swiftly toward them, "how they proposed to get us and this baggage over to that side."

"Were you much worried about it?"

He smiled at her.

"No, my dear. I expected they'd find some means of transportation."

There was a delay for two days at the Lower Post, to allow the horses a rest before a fresh start was made, and the men had time for talk with the factor at the post.

"Secatz?" he said in answer to a question from Flapjack. "Of course I know him. He lives the best part of the year here at the post. Met him out trapping, did you? He's a good little man. It's a pity you can't see him, but one of the up-river Indians came in last night and called him to a council they are having at the Old Camping Place. He left early this morning. He is a sort of chief, you know. These thick-woods Indians haven't the close-knit organization of the plains tribes, but when a head man has personality, as Secatz has, they seek his advice and usually follow it."

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"Ain't they a chance he might be back to-morrow?" asked the young cowpuncher. "I'd sure like to see him again."

Mr. Simpson laughed.

"The Old Camping Place is forty miles upstream from here above the Lower Canyon, and almost where the Frances River comes in. Even two Indians in a light canoe will hardly get up there much before to-morrow with rapids to fight."

"Then if they have a long powwow they may still be there when we go by. We go up the Frances, don't we? I'd like to see Secatz. I got an extra gun I think he could use."

"If you really want him to have that gun," replied the factor, dryly, "you had better leave it here for him. True enough you go up the Frances, but you will strike across country to it a bit above here if you follow the route the Indians say that Inspector Moodie's party took. You won't go anywhere near the Old Camping Place."

So Flapjack got out his extra pistol from his pack and left it with the factor for his friend. It was the best he could do in token of remembrance and farewell.

For the horsewranglers the next three months were a culminating nightmare to which the opening stage was a fit introduction. A few miles beyond the post a hurricane had swept the country half a hundred years before and gray trunks lay tangled like a giant's jackstraws, worn smooth by rains and snows, and hard as iron. The trail led across this maze as the occasional blaze of the Mounted Police testified, but it was impossible to ride over such going. The five dismounted and led their animals for hours, scrambling up over obstacles, and creeping cautiously down, leading around an impossible snarl of dead trees only to find the way completely barred, and the necessity of working backward out of the pocket they were in. The noon rest was scarce more than a pause for what feed there was within reach of the hungry horses was tantalizingly thin, and by night when the first belt of standing timber was reached the animals, the men and the girl were staggering on trembling legs.

The next morning they climbed a ridge above the Liard to avoid a cliff against which the river foamed and roared.

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"Guess that's the canyon the factor talked about," ventured Flapjack.

"I'm afraid you're right," was Packsaddle's reply.

"Afraid?" Anne's question challenged him.

"That canyon is just six miles from the post, Miss Anne."

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated Andy Bell.

They hoped for better going when they left the river but the plain above between the Liard and the Tsesiuh Mountains was a vast expanse of muskeg dotted here and there with little lakes and a dwarf growth of jack-pine and poplar. In the worst places the Mounted Police had cut this brush and laid it down to form a footing for their horses, but the winter had made this light corduroy brittle and useless, and the American party now must go farther afield to find other to take its place.

It was the season of the year when mosquitoes and flies were at their dreadful worst and, in spite of greasing, the horses were driven well-nigh frantic. The party moved with an attendant cloud that swirled and stung wherever it touched, save when the lashing mountain showers swept across the valley driving the insects to cover, it is true, but drenching men and horses with icy rain. And after these showers the way was boggier than before, so that they toiled along it with the dragging steps of an evil dream, wondering if they cared to purchase so brief a respite at such a price.

Even Anne was but dimly conscious of the beauty through which they were passing, of the clear sharp peaks of the Cassiars with their trappings of snow to the southwest, of the rounded treeless shoulders of the Tsesiuh on the right, and the tumble of ranges ahead to which they were slowly drawing near. All her attention as all her strength was absorbed in the task of endurance.

Nine long days passed before the trail came out on the bench above the Frances, and turned to parallel the river through an open glade of black pine and larch. The terrace dropped steeply for over a hundred feet to the rushing water, and the horsewranglers selected a wind-swept point for their camp that they might have a few hours' freedom from the flies. In a little ravine halfway down to the river was the spring where Flapjack and Andy went with

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Anne to carry up water. They filled their pails and leaving them by the spring climbed on down to the edge of the Frances. It was many months since any of them had seen such a stream.

"How clear it is!" cried the girl.

"It's like Medicine Lodge Creek at home," said Flapjack. "Medicine Lodge is that same brown with lights deep down that away, like a fire burnin'."

"It's amber water," was Anne's verdict, and she lingered after the men were gone to watch it and to listen to its song. And thus it came about that at supper that night she had a puzzle to present to the others.

"I thought I saw an Indian by the spring as I came up from the river," she told them, "but when I called to him he disappeared. Funny way for an Indian to behave. They're usually so curious. I looked around but I couldn't see where he might be camping."

"Perhaps the Indians up here are shy," suggested her father. "They can't see white people very often."

The three horsewranglers had set down their coffee cups when she began. Now Flapjack spoke in a tone that was elaborately careless.

"Very likely that's it, or maybe you're seein' things, Miss Anne. Mr. Simpson said this ain't Injun country, and I need a little more sugar in this coffee a mine. Preacher, what makes this river clear and brown when all the other ones we've saw was milky-like or yellow?"

The Preacher did not know, he said, but he ventured a guess to which the others added surmises of their own and the discussion lasted until camp work was done and the bedrolls had been dragged back from the fire to selected locations under the trees.

"Come along, Flapjack," said Packsaddle, "I'm goin' to take a last look at them horses."

Andy fell in step beside them as they strolled toward the flat where the herd stood knee-deep in the best feed they had seen since they had left the mountains.

"They ain't likely to stray far while they have that," chuckled the freighter.

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He looked back over his shoulder to be sure that the camp was out of sight and then suddenly his whole manner changed. With the others at his heels he made a wide circle to the head of the ravine above the spring. Slowly and carefully the three worked down the bank. The evening afterglow slanting along the ground picked out each dent and hollow. It was easy to find Anne's tracks coming up from the river to the margin of the spring and in a thicket were the prints of two men in moccasins. They had evidently been in hiding some time for the feet had shifted often.

"Perhaps they were there all the while you were at that spring," remarked the freighter grimly.

The trail led down to a little cove where the marks in the mud showed that a bark canoe had lain cunningly hidden. There was no sign of the launching and the horsewranglers expected none for they had seen that bark canoes were always lifted clear and set full length upon the water before the paddlers climbed in. The tracks of the Indians stepped into the stream as if to execute this maneuver. Andy Bell drew a long breath of relief.

"Well, whoever they were, they're both gone!" he said.

Packsaddle grunted. His eyes were on Flapjack who was slowly skirting the bank, moving away from the point where the horsewranglers had camped and peering at the ground. Presently the young cowpuncher waved his arm. The others joined him. He had found another pair of moccasin tracks leading to the river.

"He come out walkin' backward," and Packsaddle's tone implied that this discovery confirmed some theory he held.

Andy stooped to examine the heavy heel impression. Then he nodded.

"What's your idea?" he asked.

"Well, first, that he don't want to be followed. So we might just as well get back to camp. He's probably a damn sight better at this game than we are, and we won't gain nothin' by chasin' his tracks. And second, he's a scout, for he's just sent his little playmate here to tell the resta the gang what he's found out."

"What's he found out?"

"I'd give a lot to know," Packsaddle's voice was anxious. "He

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might be just curious and shy like the Preacher said, and again he might be—" A silent glance passed between him and Flapjack.

"Yes?" Andy urged.

"I don't know, Andy. But anyways we ain't goin' to give the horses the rest we planned to-morrow. If the resta the gang is a long ways away, we may fool 'em. Unless the trail is just plumb bad we ought to make better time than they can, comin' upstream in canoes."

But the trail was bad. There was another stretch of down timber, complicated by a growth of jack-pine coming up through it and spreading a tangle of resinous branches to mask the smaller logs and to catch the feet of horses and men. Again and again they fell. One of the pack-horses broke its leg and had to be shot. Two of Packsaddle's mules became so exhausted that the packs had to be taken from their backs, but even thus lightened they could not keep the pace and straggled into camp at night hours after the others had come to a halt.

There were moccasin tracks in the thicket by the spring the next morning and the horsewranglers held a brief council of war.

"It ain't curiosity that's keepin' him followin' us," remarked Andy Bell.

"And it ain't goin' to do no good to hunt him out and kill him," added Flapjack regretfully, "since his pardner has told the rest of the tribe where we was day before yesterday."

"There sure ain't no way of hidin' the tracks of a herda horses from Injuns that's set on findin' 'em," said Packsaddle. "We just got to push on as fast as we can. We're gettin' into the mountains and every mile must be making the canoein' harder on the river."

"I suppose there ain't no other way." Again Flapjack's tone was regretful. "But I believe another day like yesterday would damn near kill the Preacher. And there's muskeg ahead."

"We must divide the packs then, boys, and spread 'em out over twenty of the horses that wasn't under pack yesterday. We'll make the best time if we use the critters to spell each other, and load 'em light."

But even for the fresher animals the trail was slow. The muskeg

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had a hard bottom, so it was not necessary to pave the way with brush, but the horses sank a foot or more with every step and progress was incredibly toilsome. For eight days more they struggled up the river valley, which now they could not leave as the mountains were closing in on either hand. Down timber alternated with muskeg or with more down timber growing up in jack-pine. The only respite was afforded by the times when mountain ridges came down to the river bank to form Middle and Upper Canyons. Then if the wearied eyes of the horsewranglers were blind to the fantastic beauty of gleaming white gateways, of crumbling walls and pinnacles of creamy rock and red shale, their ears still welcomed the rushing roar of the river below the perpendicular cliffs. Such rapids would be a serious obstacle and would mean delay for the canoes on the river.

Anne might have noticed their preoccupation, she might have questioned their arbitrary orders not to leave camp even to get a pail of water, if she had not been absorbed by anxiety for her father. Mr. Shirley was breaking under the inhuman fatigue. He had taken a cold during one of the first days when they had to lead the horses through muskeg, and the condition would not yield to any of her mother's store of medicines. Aggravated by the chill of the daily showers that swept the high country his cough grew racking and incessant, breaking the little rest he was able to get when he crawled into his blankets at night too exhausted to sleep. He made light of the matter, however, packing, driving and tending the nine horses that had been allotted to him at the start as if nothing were amiss, until one morning on the ridge above the Upper Canyon, when Packsaddle saw him stagger as he lifted a pack from the ground. With outlandish oaths the old freighter ordered him into his saddle at once and threatened him with a painful death if he stirred his feet from his stirrups.

"I ain't standin' for no back-talk, Preacher. You're ridin' to-day. We'll tend your string a horses between the rest of us."

The Preacher yielded but his illness had become too acute for the little relief they could give him to avail. In a few hours he was sagging in the saddle with flushed cheeks and dull unseeing eyes. For

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the rest of the day until the trail dipped down for the crossing of the Frances, Anne led his horse while Flapjack rode beside him, holding him upright with a steady arm.

At the bank of the river they camped, lifting the Preacher to a couch improvised of several of the packs until they could set up the tent. Andy and Flapjack made a bed of pine branches to keep his blankets from the sodden ground; then they carried the sick man in and laid him gently down. Before turning away Flapjack spoke to Anne.

"The Police have left a sign here that says we need a raft to cross the river, so we wouldn't be ridin' to-morrow anyways, but Packsaddle says he ain't travelin' till your dad has rested up. Don't you worry, Miss Anne. It's been a bad road, and of course he's dead for sleep. He'll be all right so soon as he gets a little rest."

With a gasp Anne caught at his arm.

"He—he looks dreadfully sick to me," she said in a small, frightened voice.

"Of course he does. People always look dreadful when they get played out in high country," declared the cowpuncher stoutly. "You'll take notice of that when you've knocked around mountains as much as I have. Give him a day's sleep and he'll be laughin' at you for gettin' scared. And, Miss Anne, I'm cookin' now. You get some sleep yourself."

"Thank you, Charlie," she said simply. "I would be glad if you started things, but I think, if you don't mind, I'd rather work after I've made him comfortable. It is easier to work than think."

He nodded and left her. When a few minutes later she joined the men at the fire, Packsaddle looked up inquiringly.

"He seems to be asleep," she said in answer to the look, "but his breathing is queer."

"That's the altitude, Miss Anne," the freighter began but she stopped him with a little gesture.

"There's no use lying to me, boys, I know he's very sick and it may be a long time before he's well enough to travel. I just can't have you men held up here by us, and the short summer going. No! Wait! Listen to what I have to say. I know we could find our way

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back to the fort when he's better again on the trail the horses have made, and—"

"It ain't no use a-tall to go on, Miss Anne. We ain't leavin' you behind. Your dad's goin' to have a good rest, and then if he don't feel like settin' in a saddle we'll fix up some sort of a do with blankets and carry him layin' down. Don't waste your breath arguin'. Andy and Flapjack feel the same as me. We ain't leavin' go of our good luck just when you got us almost to the Pelly, are we, boys?"

"Bet your life, we ain't!" declared Andy.

"We'd do a lot for you, Miss Anne," added Flapjack, "but you mustn't ask us to give up our mascots."

"Oh!" she cried, "you—you horsewranglers!"

They rolled themselves in their blankets around the fire so as to be on hand if she should call, and Packsaddle was roused toward morning by the girl's hand on his shoulder.

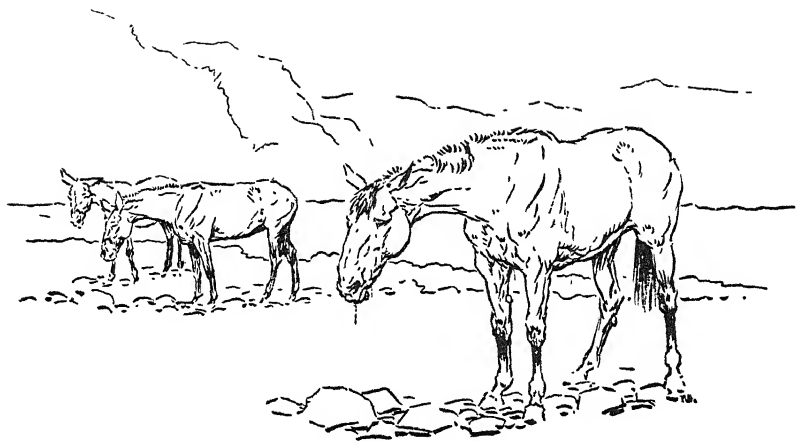
"He's still sleeping," she told him, "but he seems different and I wish you'd come—and look at him."

Packsaddle followed her to the tent where presently the others joined them. The Preacher was lying with head and shoulders propped up a little.

"He seemed to breathe better that way," his daughter said.

The flush of fever was gone but his face was strangely leaden, and his breath came in loud intermittent gasps. Packsaddle stood silent by the bed and after a searching look at him Anne dropped on her knees. Slipping her arm under her father's neck she drew his head against her shoulder, as if she would defend him somehow with her arms. So she held him with her eyes upon his face until the gasping sighs ceased in shuddering silence.

And afterward she still held him so.



Chapter XVII

JUDGMENT IN THE WILDERNESS

THE men stirred finally and at a gesture from Flapjack Pack-saddle laid his hand on the girl's head.

"He's gone, Miss Anne," he said huskily, and as she raised her face and he saw the stark terror in her dark eyes, he went on, still keeping his hand upon her hair. "Now you belong to us. We ain't much of a substitute, the three of us together, for him, but we'll do our damndest. We ain't much but anyways you're not alone."

As he spoke the terror in her eyes gradually died leaving only grief, immense and shadowy. Gently she laid her father back on his bed of blankets. Then she turned to them as if she had something to say, but instead of speaking she got slowly to her feet. She was staring beyond them. They whirled about to see a file of Indians drawn up beyond the fire. The horsewranglers stepped outside the little tent and stood together at its door, shielding with their bodies the girl and her dead. As they did so the leader of the Indians moved forward.

"Secatz!" cried Flapjack, starting toward him in relief, with outstretched hand.

The Indian's face was strangely stern, but he crossed the firelit

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space and took his friend's hand. At the same time another Indian moved forward and touching Secatz on the shoulder spoke rapidly in the Casca tongue, pointing meanwhile at Packsaddle with a maimed hand on which two fingers only remained. Presently he addressed Flapjack in English.

"That man kill Beavertail Johnnie. I see him shoot him with a gun."

At this Packsaddle joined the group, leaving Andy on guard at the tent door.

"Sure I killed him," he said quietly, "and I tried to get you too. You were shootin' our horses."

A murmur rose from the other Indians but Secatz and the two-fingered man silenced it with a gesture. Secatz spoke to Flapjack.

"My friend, we not fight with you, but this man has kill Beavertail Johnnie. He say so. We know he do it. You are my friend. You can go, you, that old man and his daughter, that young man," he lifted his chin toward Andy, "all can go. But this man," he pointed at Packsaddle, "we take him with us. And horses too, we take them."

"Secatz," said Flapjack earnestly, "you don't understand. Beavertail Johnnie killed five of our horses. We caught him killing, and Packsaddle, this man here, shoot."

Secatz nodded.

"That's right, he shoot Beavertail Johnnie. Now we take him. And horses, too."

"Where you take him?"

"To the Company. To Mr. Simpson at fort. He tell us what we must do."

Flapjack's jaw dropped.

"You ain't goin' to kill him then?" he asked.

"If Mr. Simpson say kill him, we kill. We ask Mr. Simpson."

"That's all right with me, Flapjack," declared Packsaddle. "Simpson's a white man, he'll understand we couldn't leave 'em kill our horses. You just camp here with the herd and Miss Anne, while I takes a run back to the fort with these Johnnies and fix it up."

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"We take horses, too," insisted Secatz.

"The hell you will!" cried Packsaddle angrily, but Flapjack laid a warning hand upon his arm.

"Slack off a bit, pardner! They got us sewed up in a sack. If they say they're goin' to take the horses, they'll probably do it."

"But I can't wrangle them horses alone, and I'm damned if them Injuns can touch 'em while I'm alive!"

"We'll all go together, Packsaddle," said Anne Shirley. They saw her standing in the tent door with Andy. "Really, I'd rather go with you anyway than have to wait for you—here."

"It's a long hard road for you, Girl," Flapjack demurred.

"I know. But I'd rather, really. I couldn't wait—here."

The three understood and Flapjack explained to Secatz that her father lay dead inside the tent. This was a situation the Indian could comprehend, and with a gesture of apology to the girl at the tent door he drew off his hunters for a few hours to allow the white men privacy to dig their grave. When all was over the horsewranglers took up the back-trail with the Indians forming a rear-guard on their heels, and something over two weeks later they straggled into the enclosure of Sylvester's Lower Post.

Simpson, the factor, saw them from his porch and came to meet them with amazement on his face. His glance took in the following Indians and recognized Secatz.

"I see you did find your friend," he said to Flapjack. "Come after that gun?"

Flapjack shook his head.

"We're in trouble, Mr. Simpson."

Here the two-fingered interpreter broke in.

"These men been treatin' us bad, Mr. Simpson. We bring 'em here for council with you."

The factor's face grew serious, and without a word he led them back to the porch of his house. He was evidently following some accepted procedure for the Indians pushed the white men and the girl to the foot of the steps where Secatz and the interpreter had taken their places, and then fell back in a semicircle facing the house. The horses left to their own devices wandered grazing be-

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tween the buildings. Simpson dragged a chair to the edge of the steps and seated himself.

"Now," he said, "what's it all about?"

"This man," began the interpreter pointing to Packsaddle, "kill Beavertail Johnnie. He shoot him up near head of Rancheria River. I saw it."

"How about that, Mr. Raymond—your name is Raymond, isn't it?" the factor asked. He had drawn a notebook from his pocket.

"That's my name," Packsaddle agreed, "and I shot the Indian all right. He was killin' our horses."

"He was killing your horses?"

"He sure was! I caught him redhanded and of course I killed him."

"Why 'of course'? That's no reason for killing a man!"

It was the horsewranglers' turn to show amazement. In their excitement they all spoke at once.

"The hell it ain't!"

"It sure is!"

"We call it the best reason in the world in our country!"

The factor's face stiffened.

"Mr. Raymond, answer this question honestly. If you had caught a white man doing what that Indian had done would you have shot him out of hand?"

"I sure would!"

The factor's eyes sought the other two in corroboration.

"Bet your life!" said Andy Bell.

"That's right, Mr. Simpson," Flapjack added.

"Is that the law?" Mr. Simpson was plainly incredulous.

"It ain't a matter for law, when a man makes way with a horse," explained Packsaddle.

"What an amazing state of things!" declared the Englishman. "But it puts the affair in a different light. Let me hear your side of it."

Packsaddle told of missing the horses, of finding the bones of four and coming on the two Indians just after they had killed the fifth.

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"I ain't heard this fellow deny that him and Beavertail got the others," he concluded.

"Two Fingers," said the factor, "you hear this man. How many of his horses did you kill?"

"We kill five horses, Mr. Simpson. Was very bad on the river last winter. No game. People was starvin'."

The factor nodded, and thought the matter over while the parties to the dispute waited in suspense. After a few moments he raised his head.

"Secatz," he said, "you understand English but I'm going to ask Two Fingers to tell the people what these men say."

Secatz nodded his assent.

"Tell them, Two Fingers, these men come from another land a long way to the south. In that land they have a custom that a man who steals a horse or kills a horse is killed. These men did not know our laws, that no one must kill a man. They did not know that he who kills a man is killed. They saw Beavertail Johnnie kill the horse and they killed him, as is their custom. Tell them that."

The horsewranglers watched the faces of the Indians as this was interpreted and saw little sign of softening. The factor went on.

"We cannot treat these men as if they knew our laws. I cannot tell you to kill this man who shot Beavertail Johnnie, because he did not know it was against our law. It was custom in his land. But he has killed a good hunter. You will have less food now that Beavertail Johnnie is gone. He must pay you in food for the life of this hunter. You may take his horses. Not the horses of these other men or of this woman, but only the horses of the man who killed Beavertail Johnnie."

Secatz nodded again.

"His horses are many," he said. "We shall not be hungry. It is good!"

The interpreter repeated these speeches while the horsewranglers stood too stunned to speak, and a murmur of approval came from the crowd.

"But that is not all," the factor went on. "You know our laws,

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Two Fingers, and Beavertail Johnnie knew them. Those horses you killed were not yours. They belonged to this man."

"People was starvin', Mr. Simpson. We need food."

"You knew our law," reiterated the factor. "You should have gone to this man and talked to him about his horses. They were not yours to kill. Now you must pay this man double for those you killed. You must give back to him two horses for each horse you killed. You knew our laws and you must pay."

The interpreter looked at Secatz and the old man made a gesture of assent.

"It is right," he said. "We know our laws."

"Well," said Simpson, rising briskly, "all there is left to do is to ask Mr. Raymond to pick out his ten horses. Take aside your saddle-horses, you others. Every one understands that you're not in on this."

Anne Shirley sat down on the steps of the porch, the bridle of Lovell's pony in her hand, while Flapjack and Andy rode off to round up the scattered horses for Packsaddle. One by one the animals were relieved of their packs and the choosing began. The freighter first selected Roman Nose, and four of the best range horses, then he looked at his mare and the six attendant mules.

"Mr. Simpson," he asked, "ain't they no way I could buy two a them mules. I got pardners, that's in Dawson by now, I hope, that oughta have five of these ten animals. But them mules—they been through hell and high water with me before ever I set out on this trip. I can't turn two of 'em over to be ate by Injuns."

The factor considered this.

"How are you off for grub?" he asked, his eyes on the scattered packs.

"We're ahead on grub," Packsaddle assured him. "The Company fed us while we was packin' for 'em last fall."

"Then we'll call Secatz."

The Indian when summoned was willing to accept flour, beans and bacon for the two mules and on this basis the final division was made. Sorrowfully the old freighter watched the twenty-nine range horses trotting away ahead of their Indian herders. His shoul-

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ders drooped as if the whole fatigue of his two thousand mile journey had suddenly fallen upon them.

"Mr. Simpson," he said as they turned to go back to the factor's house, "I can see how with the laws you have you saved my life, and I'm plumb grateful. But I sure think with them laws this must be a hell of a country for white men."

The factor filled his pipe before he answered.

"I don't know," he said. "There are two sides to the question. We've settled our western country and we've had but one massacre by Indians and that was in a time of war."

"What's that got to do with this?" queried Packsaddle.

"Indians don't feel they have to take matters in their own hands when things go wrong, because they know they can get a fair hearing even against a white man at the nearest post of the Company or of the Mounted Police. That's the other side. And do you know why the Mountie wears a scarlet coat?"

"Why?"

"General Butler recommended it when he suggested the formation of the Force, so that an Indian would be able to distinguish him as far as he could see him, from the blue-coated soldier south of the Line who was not his friend. The Mounted have ridden alone all through the West, and they've waded into all kinds of trouble alone, but the only time we ever had a man on patrol ambushed and killed by Indians was when some of your American Sioux were in Canada for a short while. It is something to think about, Mr. Raymond."

It was the last week in July before the Americans made their second start from the Liard post. And as the diminished cavalcade trotted up the river and began to pick its way across the first down timber Flapjack suddenly laughed. Packsaddle who was riding beside him looked up at the sound.

"What's so damn funny?" he asked.

"I was thinkin' of somethin' Mis' Gilbert said before we set out. We was boastin', me and Kansas, about the value of that herd we had. 'Worth twenty thousand dollars,' Kansas says. An' Mis' Gilbert she looked at us. 'You haven't collected it yet,' she says."

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"Well, she sure was right," remarked Packsaddle soberly.

Day after day the little train worked its way toward the Divide.

The muskeg was a little firmer than it had been in June, showers were not quite so frequent, but the mosquitoes were vicious and numerous as ever, and down timber was still down timber. Up the Liard, across the bench through fallen trees and muskeg to the Frances and up the Frances they labored, penetrating deeper and deeper into mountain country, moving ever more slowly as the accumulating fatigue bore down on them all. At length they left behind the places where the white-faced girl on Lovell's pony was always seeing a shadowy memory of her father struggling along before her. They had rafted the Frances and were pushing up its western bank to the end of Frances Lake. There were little ponds on the bench they were following above the river and grass grew thick and green, but they dared not linger even to give the horses the rest and refreshment they needed. Time was growing too short.

"God alone knows," observed Packsaddle, "how far we've got to go yet—and winter comin'."

They climbed a low ridge with the river, hardly more than a brook now, scouring a bend around its foot and through the poplars they saw the long expanse of Frances Lake. For twenty, thirty miles the water stretched before them in two diverging branches. The Logan Mountains extended a mighty barrier to the east and far around to the north, rocky peaks seven and nine thousand feet high with snow lying on their shoulders and crawling down their ravines to meet the dark advance-guard of the forest creeping up from the plain. Even the ridge between the two arms of the lake ran up three thousand feet above the water.

"Heavens! Do we have to climb those things?" cried Anne aghast to Packsaddle.

"I sure hope not," replied the freighter, "because if we do, we can't." And at this complicated statement even the girl had to laugh.

The trail, however, swung to the west following the gravel beach of the lake's western arm, where the horses stumbled over the rolling stones for fifteen miles and snuffed hungrily at the poplar

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leaves on the bank that offered the only possible forage at the camping-place. The Finlayson River entered the lake through a canyon but the trail turned off around a hill before the river mouth was reached. The animals pressed eagerly up the bank, anxious to leave the barren stones, only to plunge into a soft green moss where they sank halfway to their knees at every step, a moss which carpeted the forest through which they traveled in an unbroken stretch for ten interminable miles. At last, staggering and uncertain, heaving and coughing with fatigue, they reached a drier place where the forest had been burned and grass grew deep.

"We're campin' here for a day whatever happens further on," said Packsaddle with decision. "Them critters has done all that can be asked of them. They gets a rest."

And as they yet stood considering which side of the clearing would be best for their camp, a bull moose, climbing up the bank from the river walked almost upon them. All three men blazed away at once and the big creature fell, thus assuring the party fresh meat in plenty for the next few days.

"It's a pity we can't pack the whole carcass along," the freighter said, "but them horses and mules can't stand a pound of extra weight. We'll each take a chunk on the back of our saddles and make out to do with that."

They had passed now through the mountain barrier west of Frances Lake and for six days they followed the Finlayson through the low comparatively level country of the Pass, where deep moss alternated with brush and swamps and the tall trees bearded with hairy green lichen gave way to the stunted growth of the timberline, and where mosquitoes lay in wait in murderous swarms during the heat of the day, and the chill of perpetual winter penetrated the blankets at night. It was well that no heavy grade was added to the boggy obstacles of the trail or the pack animals would not have been able to get along at all. As it was they plodded wearily, stumbling often, falling more than was good for them, and when near Finlayson Lake two mules were caught in a quagmire the combined strength of all the rest was not sufficient to pull them

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free. Packsaddle was forced to shoot them to end their anguished struggles with the marsh that sucked them down.

"Anyways," he said huskily, as he resumed his way, "they'll sink outa sight in that stuff and there can't no wolves get 'em nor Injuns neither."

Finlayson Lake, surrounded by a wide belt of muskeg and low shores with scattered small trees, lay at the summit of the watershed. No high peaks here marked the Divide, but merely bare-topped rounded hills shut in the sky and hid the rugged ridge of the near-by Logans. The trail the Police had made ran for eight miles a hundred feet or more above the cup of the lake on its western side where the ground, though rough, was solid underfoot, and then veered suddenly away through a shallow draw. Seven miles beyond the lake it came out on a long narrow pond that drained westward and the Divide was crossed.

The horsewranglers struggled across a meadow made treacherous by potholes, down the rocky ravine of a mountain stream, through a last agonizing bit of down timber before they found the valley opening out to show the long range of the Pelly Mountains. They camped with this view in sight. It was the first of September but only a slough and a hogback separated them from the Pelly River, and feed was plentiful on every hand. They could cross the space at leisure and then the packs could be laid down for the last time.

They took several days to build their raft, for it must be long enough and strong enough to carry the horses and mules as well as their baggage and themselves. They made it of crossed layers of logs and floored it with poles. They built a pen for the animals amidships and just forward of this they set up the largest tent, as a shelter for what was left of their provisions and a sleeping-place for Anne. Forward, aft, and along each side, space was kept clear for the operation of the navigating poles. They did not install a rudder for they felt sure they would not travel fast enough to have steerage-way.

"We'll just have to depend on poles," said Andy Bell whose knowledge of the Missouri made him skipper of the crew.

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They were up at dawn the day of their start down the river, blowing on stiffened fingers, gulping the hot coffee Anne had prepared and studying the river even while they ate. The Pelly was over a hundred yards wide, and even close inshore a chip dropped into the water moved downstream about as fast as a man could walk.

"She won't get tired neither," exulted Packsaddle. "We can ride her all day."

They felt carefree, relieved, their troubles lying all behind them, as they thought. Even the mules seemed to share their confidence in the new mode of travel, for they boarded the raft without protest and lined up at the rail of their pen with necks stretched forward curiously and great ears cocked. Only Roman Nose was restive, moving uneasily from side to side.

"I wish he wouldn't do that," Anne said. "It gives me the creeps."

"He don't understand yet," Flapjack told her. "He'll quiet down when he gets used to it."

The raft glided away from the shore and floated easily, the men holding it near enough to the bank for them to reach the bottom with their poles, but otherwise letting it take its own way. The first upward pitch from the river's flat was a hundred or more feet high and beyond the terrace the country stretched away irregular and rolling, rising to the south to a line of peaks, straight outlined as the pyramids. This southern bank was thickly wooded, the balsam-poplars flaming with the vivid gold of torches against the evergreens; the northern slope was open, carpeted with the Persian hues of rosebushes and the green and bronze of grass. Packsaddle pointed this out to Andy.

"I don't suppose we could work over to that north side, could we? Looks like better feed for the critters when we camp."

"I'll try it at the first bend we reach," said the skipper.

And cross he did, edging the nose of his craft out into the stream and sweeping over on the set of the current against the outer curve of the river's turn. They were all delighted with the success of this maneuver, and when the next evening after they had passed the

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mouth of the Hoole River Andy managed to bring the raft ashore at the very head of a dim portage path around a stretch of rapids, the admiration of the other three for their navigating officer knew no bounds.

They speculated about this portage path. Who could have worn it down if the Company had not used this route for over forty years?

"Injuns, perhaps," suggested Packsaddle.

"Or prospectors maybe," ventured Flapjack. "We're in the Yukon basin now." Silence gripped them at the thought.

They unloaded the raft above the rapids that evening and let it down the six hundred feet of white water on their knotted ropes, the men hanging back with all their weight upon their line, tearing up the ground in places where they tried to dig in to check the progress of the unwieldy craft only to be yanked from their anchorage by its erratic plunging, but landing it safely below the rapids at the last.

In the morning they transported their goods and loaded up once more, and for fifteen miles the river bore them quietly on their way, between gravelly banks with unbroken forest on the south, and stretches of meadow alternating with poplars on the north. Then all at once they rounded a bend to see the banks rising and closing in, hundred foot cliffs on either hand, black, ominous, with the river setting full against them to make a right-angled bend to the north. A stain of white quartz on the cliff and the old skids of the Hudson's Bay Company marked the entrance of the portage path, but it was on the south side and the raft was following the other shore.

Frantically the men threw themselves on the poles, forcing the bow of the raft across the stream, thrusting, shoving as long as they could touch bottom at all. Then there came the moment when the river was too deep for them when they must drift as the current would take them. The three men stood tense measuring the distance, ready to dip as soon as the further shallows might be gained.

In the lull Flapjack spoke to Anne.

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"Get back near the horses, Girl, and if we go over grab Roman Nose."

With a nod the girl moved aft. The seconds dragged. Then again the men stooped in frantic effort. Slowly, slowly the raft inched inshore, but it moved at the same time by yards downstream. The current was quickening now. The men lifted and thrust, lifted and thrust again. The shore was almost at hand. The bow grated, scraped and for a breath the raft stood still. Then with a queer sidling motion its stern swung out into the stream where the river caught it in resistless hands. Stern first, faster and faster, on the crest of a ridge of foam, it swept into the waiting canyon. Anne standing by the big roan horse was aware of rocks in the river rushing toward her and sliding by. The men were beside her, ahead of her, on that stern deck, fending with their poles. Then the cliff leaped at them. There was a rending crash and the roaring whiteness of foam engulfed them all.

Once Anne was conscious of air. They had come to the surface, the big horse swimming strongly, and she beside him with her fingers knotted in his mane. Then something laid hold upon them both and dragged them under, down and down, despite the convulsive struggling of the horse, while the white about them turned to gray and the gray to nothingness.

Consciousness returned first through her ears, a distant roaring drew nearer, filled the world, with a terror of sound that weighed upon her eyelids and would have kept them closed if with a tremendous effort she had not lifted them. Gray mist about her and through the mist, distorted and strangely magnified, Flapjack's face. She gazed at it thoughtfully but the roaring was still too great for her to attempt to speak. Slowly she let her lids fall again beneath that weight of sound. When she had gathered strength to look again the sound had become the roaring of the river beside her, and the gray mist was gone. Weakly she sat up. Packsaddle was supporting her shoulders, Flapjack held her hands and Andy sitting on his heels beside her was surveying her with anxious eyes. All three grinned encouragement.

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"We all got out," she asked them, "and the horses, and your mules?"

Packsaddle coughed. And Anne's eyes wandered down the beach. Roman Nose stood near them with drooping head. Two mules beyond him gazed at the water with listless eyes.

"The rest are gone?" she asked again.

"Well, Flapjack had another horse but he had to leave it go when that whirlpool turned you and Roman Nose loose."

"It was a whirlpool then?"

Packsaddle nodded.

"And it throwed you in toward shore or we never coulda got you out."

"Where are we?"

"On the north side just below the canyon. We musta come most a mile through that water, and it sure is a wonder we any of us is alive. If you think you can move now we'll get up the bank and think things over. Them critters is about ready to lay down on the stones."

Their position when they surveyed it was desperate. With the raft had gone not only their food but their guns and ammunition, their axes and their matches. They had escaped with only their lives and the torn clothing on their backs.

"But there ought to be driftwood below a rapid like that," remarked Flapjack. "We can fix us some sorta raft."

"And we may run onto prospectors any day," added Andy cheerfully. "There's a cabin right across the river here. Looks as if it ain't been lived in this year but we're sure to find men somewhere, perhaps to-morrow."

It was a long task to collect poles of an even length and to learn the trick of tying them securely together with willow twigs, but at last they set out on a flimsy platform down the unknown river. They worked gingerly through shallow places and at each bend they landed to scout ahead.

"We ain't comin' on no more canyons without we gets a warnin' at least," asserted Packsaddle.

There was abundant grass for the horse and the mules, now on

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the north shore, now on the south, but the men could find nothing for themselves save the scarlet haws of the wild roses. They gathered these in handfuls and chewed them experimentally.

"What do they taste like?" Andy put the question generally.

"If they was sour they might be green apples," Packsaddle declared, "but they ain't sour."

Anne explored them meditatively with tooth and tongue.

"They haven't any taste at all, but they do have a feel," she announced. "They feel like apples."

But unlike apples they could not satisfy the gnawing hunger, as days went by, rather they seemed to sharpen and intensify its pain. And all the while the horse and the mules grew fat on the inaction and the good feed.

"I know how them critters felt," asserted Andy, "when we was goin' up Lake Frances, watchin' us swallowin' three good meals a day while they had nothin' but them stones."

"No, you don't know how they felt. Not by a damn sight!" contradicted Packsaddle.

"Why not?"

"Because you ain't wore out haulin' their grub for 'em."

"I guess you're right, Packsaddle. If it's their turn now, they sure earned it."

After the first night Andy always steered the raft inshore before the sun went down that they might find or make a hollow in the bank for their night's shelter while there was still some warmth in the ground, and as soon as the animals had been hobbled and turned out to graze the four crept into it. As the chill of the night descended they cowered together for warmth, all sense of the physical contact lost in the shuddering agony of the cold. Sleep was a fitful, tormented thing, and when the first dawn glimmered on the river they crawled out, relieved at least to be moving.

These nights of torture and the days of constant physical toil combined with the lack of food to break down their strength until they were scanning the banks for signs of men with eyes that were no longer trustworthy. Each knew he was beginning to people the shores with shapes that kept pace with the moving raft,

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but that vanished when a ray of sunlight slanted full on rocks and trees. They still knew they were not real, but they saw them. For Anne it was her mother walking there, turning her face to her daughter with anxious, questioning eyes. Again her father stumbled through down timber in a place where no trees grew.

The time came when they no longer attempted to guide the raft, when they let it float for the most part as it would, stern first, bow first or sidewise, however the current took it, husbanding their efforts for avoiding obstacles and for the landing at the end of the day. When they were not actually at the poles the men sat or lay prone. One afternoon ten days or more after the disaster in the canyon a wide river almost as large as the Pelly came in from the north, emptying a dirty flood into the clear water that they had been following. On the bank where the two streams met were cabins, not one, but many, a whole mining camp.

Flapjack saw them first. He looked at them, closed his eyes and then stared again. They were still there. He turned to the others to see that they were also looking. Then all at once the four were on their feet, waving and yelling feebly. They poled with all their remaining strength, pausing now and again to breathe and wave and yell. At last their clumsy platform rested against the bank. Without waiting to loose the animals they stumbled up the slope, not noticing in their excitement that no answer had come to their hail. Along the bank on either hand the cabins stood empty. Rotting doors sagged on broken hinges, windows gaped on blackness within. The tall red-top grass of the Pelly valley waving slightly in the evening wind was the only motion in the streets.

"They been gone a long time," said Andy dully.

A sign hung slantwise from a rusty nail driven into a tree near the landing. Packsaddle read the dim letters.

"HUMBUG CITY."

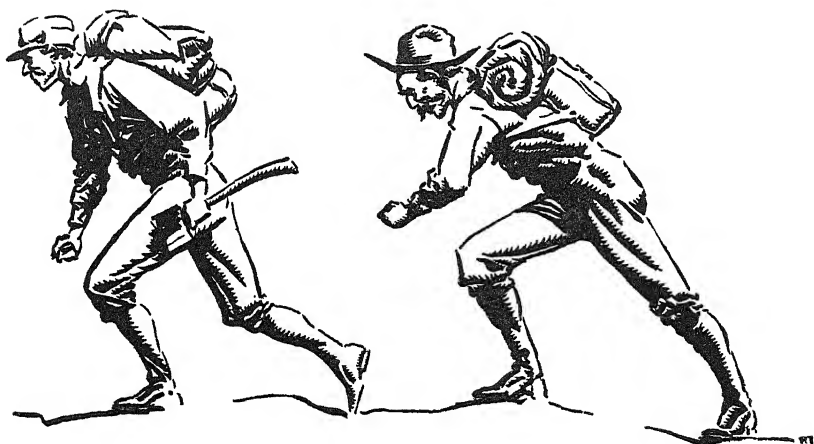
Suddenly Anne began to laugh, with a high shrill sound.

"Boys," she gasped between gusts that shook her, "don't you see—it's what we all are, we that have tried to come from civilization into this dreadful North—humbugs—and the North finds us

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out—there was a whole city of them here, but the North got them—as it's getting us——”

And once again, though her face was a mask of horror, laughter tore through her lips, insane laughter, high and shrill.



Chapter XVIII

THE TWO BECOME MINERS

WHEN Kansas returned from the haying job with Doc he found that the two Canadians, whom he had left building a cabin just beyond Mrs. Wills' place, had departed for the mines. Friends from Ontario had offered them a share in a partnership, Mrs. Wills told him, which they could not wisely refuse. Thus cut off from his companions of the trail and with Doc for his partner, Kansas felt almost as if he were an old timer. A slender poke of gold dust received from Chisholm as pay for the ten days' work seemed to afford ample credentials admitting him to the circle of early spring arrivals among whom Doc moved, and on the day of the parade of the Yukon Territorials, sent down from Fort Selkirk to reënforce the Mounted Police, he was a part of the throng, a spectator no longer. But he could not yet rise to the heights of the veritable "sourdough" like Nigger Jim, the tall blond Southerner who stood beside him in the crowd. Nigger Jim had been in the country since the Stewart Stampede and he viewed the lines of blue-clad men with disapproval.

"I reckon this place gettin' too damn civilized foh me," he drawled in the soft voice that had won him his nickname. "I'd better be movin' along to the frontieh."

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"Where will you be goin', Nigger Jim?" asked Doc at his shoulder. "You're pretty near the front edge of the frontier here."

"I don' know exactly. Mebbe it's not the frontieh I'm lookin' foh, but the jumpin'-off place. Anyhow, I'm leavin'."

Doc laughed as the crowd broke up and the Southerner drifted away. But that night in their shack just below Bonanza Avenue he brought up the subject of the old timer's lament again.

"The 'jumpin'-off place,' " he repeated to Kansas. "Do you know, I can understand what he feels. I'm goin' to look for it myself one of these days. See here."

He pulled a dirty knot of chamois from his shirt bosom where it hung suspended from his neck by an ancient length of string. Untying it he took out a curious nugget like a flattened model of a pitcher an inch tall. Handle and lip, it was complete. Kansas examined it with interest.

"Where'd that come from?" he asked. "I never see nothin' like it."

"No, nor you won't around here. Klondike gold don't run to nuggets much."

"Then it ain't—"

"It ain't Klondike gold."

After this statement Doc smoked a while in silence, idly fingering the odd little pitcher with his free hand. Then suddenly he sat up and leaning forward in a low voice plunged into the midst of his tale.

"When I come in here, Kansas, last spring, one of my campin'-places was near the outlet of Lake Marsh. You know how we got our stuff along. I had a kinda hand-sleigh and even on the level ice of the lake I couldn't load it up with no more than three hundred and fifty pounds, so it was takin' me three trips between my camps there to move all my outfit from one place to the next. One night when I come into camp I see a bunch of Indians had come down from inside, and while I was cookin' my supper some of the girls drifts over and begins goin' the rounds of the Klondikers' tents, sellin' fish—and other things. One of 'em come up to

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my fire, and although I says I don't need no fish she stands watchin' me fixin' my grub.

" 'Me good cook,' she says after a while.

"I looked up at her at that and she sure was pretty for a squaw. With me lookin' at her that away she comes nearer. She sits down and sorta leans towards me and then I sees this nugget swingin' forward from a string around her neck. It sure took my eye, even if I was a chechako.

" 'Where you get?' I asks, pointin' at it.

"She just tosses her head.

" 'Oh, I got,' she says.

"Well, I done some pretty quick thinkin' about her tellin' me she could cook and all. I wanted to know about that nugget, so I nods off west, bein' the way the trail come in that her crowd had followed, and I says:

" 'I know him.'

"She smiles all over her face.

" 'You know him?'

" 'Sure I know him. You cook for him last summer?'

"She shakes her head.

" 'Last fall,' she says.

" 'He's gone back there now?' I asks and I points west, still following the way her tribe had come.

" 'Nobody but a chechako woulda done it, Kansas, for all the old timers know there ain't nothin' west of Lake Marsh. But it made the girl sure I knowed her man. She nodded at me.

" 'Yes, he's gone back.'

" 'I looks off west and pretends to be calculatin'.

" 'Take him six days to get in there,' I says.

" 'No,' she says, 'five.'

" 'Six,' I tells her, plumb positive.

" 'No,' she says again. 'Five days.'

"I laughs at her.

" 'You're crazy,' I says. 'It's six days in there.'

" 'No,' she says. 'Listen. First day, Big Rock Bend, second day Takhini River, third day Cracker Creek, fourth day Shakwak

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Valley where you turn up, fifth day you go into Kluane Hills to his place on that lake.'

"I repeats all the names after her like I was surprised, but really to be sure I got 'em right, and then I adds:

" 'That's good travelin'.'

" 'He good traveler,' she says.

" 'There's plenty gold in there, all right,' I says, like I knowed all about it, and she agreed with me.

" 'Plenty gold,' she says.

" 'Well, we talks about other things a while and then I told her I didn't want to buy nothin' but this nugget. She could get plenty more up there, I says. At first she wasn't for lettin' it go, but she was hungry and when I offered her grub she changed her mind. I let her take what she wanted and she went away happy.

" 'The next day I asked some questions, cautious; and I found out, what everybody else knowed, that there wasn't nothin' west of Lake Marsh. I see I'd have to have a outfit before I took the trail she give me. Likewise I ought to know somethin' about minin' for there wouldn't be nobody in there to show me. So I come on, like I started, to Dawson, but all I'm workin' for is a stake big enough to set me up in there.'"

Doc had learned much during his months in Dawson. He had taken part in one stampede and he told Kansas he had done all the unnecessary things to which newcomers were prone.

" 'Hired a lawyer, hired a surveyor, and then lost my claim because I was too much of a damn fool to be watchin' it when watchin' was needed. But I won't make the same mistakes again,' he concluded grimly. 'I'm willin' to bet I'm the safest man in Dawson to send on a stampede now.'"

" 'I've been watchin' the layout,' observed Kansas, "and I'm takin' a job of work freightin' for Bartlett Brothers. Goin' to draw my ten a day while them as knows this minin' game does the prospectin' for me. I figure my chances are better that away.'"

" 'You're right,' agreed Doc. "Watch for stampedes and make plenty of friends so you'll be sure to be tipped off early. And if I was you I'd get me my miner's license from the Gold Commis-

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sioner's right now so as to be ready to get in on the Dominion Hill Claims."

"Dominion Hill Claims? What's them?"

Doc explained that there had always been a dispute among the surveyors as to whether hillside claims should be measured on the face of the ground or along a horizontal plane extending into the slope. At the time of the Dominion stampede the conflicting standards had resulted in such a muddle of overlapping claims that the Commissioner had closed the hillside to miners, until the question of measurement could be referred to Ottawa.

"Them hill claims oughta be good," Doc argued, "for Dominion Creek cleaned up pretty rich and the gold there is worth more than either Eldorado or Bonanza gold. There sure won't be no time for gettin' a license after the stampede starts."

"I heard at Tom Chisholm's place," remarked Kansas, "that some fellows who come in when I did has already took up some claims. How'd they get 'em when there ain't been no stampede?"

"If they had any sense they bought 'em at a Minin' Exchange. That's the only safe thing for a chechako to do," said Doc. "You pay ten per cent and you have ten days to examine what you're buyin'. If you ain't satisfied you gets back your deposit. All good properties on the exchanges. The crooked stuff goes to the mine brokers. We better go there ourselves if Dominion Hillside ain't been opened by the end of the month."

"What exchange would you pick?"

"Well, they're all good enough, but I'd favor the Yukon myself on account of the kitten."

"Kitten?"

"You bet! Only cat in Dawson, they say, an' got a pedigree as long as a prize bull's. It's their mascot."

"Any other exchanges got a mascot, Doc?"

"None, as I know of."

"I expect we'd better go to the Yukon then. We'll sure need all the luck we can get."

With the closing of navigation, days of half-suspended animation descended upon Dawson. Summer was over, winter had not

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yet begun, and the town, drawn in upon itself, seemed to wait for something. No communication from outside could break the spell, the only arrivals being those who came by small boat from neighboring camps along the river. Gray day succeeded gray day ushering in the cold, slowing down the Yukon where the first slush ice was beginning to run, slowing down the throngs on Front Street where men stopped in small groups to talk and others paused to listen.

Having purchased his right to the Dominion Hillside claims, Kansas settled down, like the town, to watch and wait. His days were spent in driving mules for Bartlett Brothers. The charge for freighting, twenty cents a pound, worked out into what seemed fabulous sums. He took in two hundred and eighty dollars for the firm after hauling thirty-four poles a half-mile from the wharf. The poles were not large either. He seriously meditated as to whether it would be wise to sell the horses when they reached Dawson. Surely he could make more with them than he could take from any mine.

His work consisted in odd jobs about town, in hauling lumber from the sawmills to the flat back of Second Avenue where shacks were replacing tents, or in packing supplies up the trail to the mining camps on the Bonanza and the Eldorado. The evenings when he was in Dawson he spent with Doc, in the crowd moving aimlessly up and down the boardwalk and the mud of Front Street, or draped against the bar in the only gathering-places, the saloons and dance halls, listening to the constant talk of gold with ears alert for every rumor. Sundays presented a problem. Bartlett Brothers closed down and so did all the places of amusement, and it seemed as if he could neither work nor play. Once after a talk with Lowe of the Canadian Bank of Commerce he attended a "sacred concert" at the Opera House. He had run into the assayer in the Aurora Number One and after the usual greetings Lowe had imparted a joyous bit of information.

"We get some queer questions put to us at the bank," he began, "but I had one to-day that took the prize. Not having any dust to handle I was helping out the boys at the counter when in came a

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woman and headed straight for me. She was a hard-looking sample of the 'red aristocracy' if ever I saw one. She produced a smile that would curdle even a glass of Tom Chisholm's milk.

"'I'm Caprice,' she said, 'and I've come for my tights.'

"'Your tights?' I asked, scarcely believing my ears.

"'Yes,' she says, 'and please be quick, for I need them to-night.'

"That was a bit too thick for me, so I called the attention of the cashier who was standing next me.

"'This lady wants her tights,' I said to him, and I give you my word my face was straight.

"'Her ti—' The cashier looked at me and then at Caprice.

"'Hurry, please!' she urged.

"He bowed to her as solemn as an owl.

"'Madame,' he said, 'you'll have to see the manager about that. He's at the end of the counter there.'

"Caprice marched around to the chief and every one in the place stopped work.

"'Are you the manager? My name's Caprice. I want my tights and slippers.'

"The chief swallowed once or twice and then he said:

"'Madame, this is a bank.'

"'I know that,' she snapped. 'Canadian Bank of Commerce, isn't it? Well, the mailman from Selkirk said he'd leave my tights and slippers here. I want them at once. I've got to rehearse.'

"And sure enough, we had them in with our mail! They say the old girl's appearing in a sacred concert at the Opera House to-morrow. The whole bank staff is going on the chance."

"And we'll be with you," declared Kansas.

"You bet!" added Doc fervently.

The sacred concert proved to be a series of living pictures. The hall was packed with an audience which greeted all the offerings with enthusiasm, but the climax of the afternoon's applause was reached when after the display of the title "Rock of Ages" the curtain rose upon Caprice clad in the tights and slippers and little else, clinging to a huge cardboard cross.

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Kansas and Doc were in the Aurora talking to Tom Chisholm when the fire broke out on the night of October fourteenth. Some one from the street brought the word, putting his head in at the door.

"The Green Pine Hotel is burning, Tom, and the wind is bringing the fire this way."

Half the crowd rushed out onto the sidewalk at these words, but those in the rear of the saloon stayed long enough to help Tom and the gamblers move the fixtures out through the back door and through the mire of the back lots to Second Avenue. Then they joined the others in the fight against the fire.

The Mounted Police and the Yukon Territorials were out in force organizing and leading the crowd. They had lines of men passing buckets from the river up the bank to the burning building, but the puny spurts of water they could muster turned to ineffectual steam in the fierceness of the blaze. As Kansas and Doc reached the street Inspector Belcher was obliged reluctantly to withdraw his men from the hotel which was past saving to concentrate on the building next it which was already afire in a half-dozen places. An officer of the Territorials appeared with tackle and ropes and after a conference with Belcher other men were set to tear down the saloon on the corner in an attempt to make a safety-guard by widening the gap of the street to protect the rest of the town. They worked with frantic haste, for the wind, though light, was gaining on the struggling bucket brigade.

No one knew who first thought of the imported fire-fighting machinery ordered in 1897, and still lying crated in front of the North American Trading Company warehouse. It was unpaid for, but the constable directing the part of the crowd where Kansas and Doc were working made a shrewd prophecy.

"If it puts out this fire," he declared, "Dawson will pay for it to-morrow."

At his orders a score of men tore the cases apart, set up the steam engine and connected the lengths of hose, while volunteer stokers filled the firebox with kindling soaked in kerosene, and fed their flames with the crating and boards ripped from the

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painted sides of the wrecked saloon. The two chemical engines were next unboxed and adjusted by impromptu mechanics. Water was quickly obtainable from the river, but in the excitement no one could remember what had been done with the chemicals shipped in with the machinery the year before. After all it was necessary to wait until the steam pump could be brought into action.

Slowly the conflagration on the street ate its way from hotel to dance hall, from dance hall to saloon, with the bucket brigade falling back step by step, yet it seemed to the agonizing stokers that the needle on the steam gauge of the new engine would never quiver into life. They had to shift position twice because of the advancing fire, but at last the steam was up, and the sweating, smoke-blackened men on the bucket lines cheered wildly as the stream of water began to play. The fire engine saved the town, and at a meeting held the next day, the money to pay for it and the other machinery was easily raised, as the constable had predicted it would be.

There was plenty of work for the freighters hauling the materials for the rebuilding of the demolished block, but several days after the fire Kansas was interrupted by Doc as he came in from a short job, for a fresh assignment.

"I just been tellin' your boss here," explained his tall partner easily, "that your brother you been lookin' for has just blowed in from Circle City and has got to leave again to-night. Mr. Bartlett's been good enough to say you can have the afternoon off."

"Glad of the chance to do you a favor, Gilbert," said Bartlett heartily.

Kansas eyed his partner meditatively, but when he spoke it was to the freighter.

"That's mighty kind of you, busy as we are. I sure appreciate it. Just where did you say this brother of mine is?"

Doc seized his arm.

"He had some business at the Gold Commissioner's Office and he said he'd wait for us there."

"If he's only got the afternoon," said Kansas gravely, "we

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mustn't waste no time. Get a move on. Thank you, Mr. Bartlett. I'll see you in the mornin'."

The two partners moved off together and as soon as they were well out of earshot Kansas gave vent to his curiosity.

"What the hell are you up to, Doc?"

"Walk along like I was sayin' nothin' interestin' and I'll tell you," said Doc in a low tone. "A fellow came up to me on the street here about a half hour ago and asked me if I had a license and could stake on Dominion, said he'd tell me where to stake if I'd give him half. Of course, I said I wasn't interested but it set me thinkin' and I've looked up three fellows that's waitin' round for that stampede and they've all left town. Then I run into Tom O'Brien and he said yes, the hillsides is openin' to-morrow at eleven A.M. Everybody and his brother will be on the trail in another hour. I got grub and blankets cached at Mrs. Wills' cabin. You go in the front door of the Commissioner's Office, just in case Bartlett should have an eye on you still, and dodge through to the back if you can get out that way. I'll meet you at Mrs. Wills'. So long."

Doc stopped at the post office and began a systematic hunt through the letters pinned to the outside of the building while Kansas hurried on to the Commissioner's. In leisurely fashion Doc worked his way around to the side of the building and unobtrusively slipped away. A few minutes later he met Kansas in Mrs. Wills' yard and the two scrambled up the side of the Knob to where the mule-trail for the diggings skirted the hill and followed this down to the Swede's scow-ferry over the Klondike.

Ten or a dozen men also equipped with blankets, picks and axes were already on the boat and they all eyed each other warily without the usual greetings. The first mile on the far side was corduroyed and the knot of stampedeers kept fairly well together, but when the road became an apology for a path over the stones and swamps of the wet wooded valleys, they began to string out, and Kansas' familiarity with the trail enabled him and his partner to pull into the lead. A quarter of a mile beyond the ferry they turned sharply into the valley of Bonanza Creek and struggled along as fast as the boulders and the knee-deep muck between them

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would permit. As long as daylight lasted Kansas could cut off remembered curves in the trail, threading through the timber across the side hill, and they soon overtook a group who had taken the ferry ahead of them; but with the coming of dusk they were all obliged to keep to the path, such as it was.

At the log cabin called the Bonanza Hotel, about four miles up the creek, men who were going down to Dawson turned back and joined the stampede. At the village of the Forks, where the road from Eldorado came in, the two-storied bunkhouse that provided shelter and meals of a sort to travelers emptied itself after them. Up the denuded hillside of the Bonanza diggings, past cabins every five hundred feet, around dumps, over sluice-boxes and beneath dripping flumes on slender supports charged the crowd with Kansas and Doc somewhere near the head. Where Carmack's Fork joined the Bonanza the trail left the creek and climbed steeply up the side of the Dome. The slope was heavily wooded and shadows dense. The pace of the stampede perforce grew slow. Now and then a muffled curse, a sliding thud and rattling stones indicated where some hurrying man had missed his footing in the dark. Once Doc crashed into a tree when the path made a sudden turn that he could not see. It was a climb of several thousand feet to the top of the Dome and even in the rush of a stampede hours were consumed before the windswept rocky summit was reached.

It was a dark night, with no sign of moon or stars. The Klondikers moved slowly along the ridge. To the left a trail branched off to Hunker Creek, to the right another offshoot led down to Sulphur Creek. Kansas and Doc kept along the ridge for a half-mile to the southeast and came to a halt where the hogback ended and the trail to Dominion plunged abruptly over the edge and into the woods again.

"We can't stake nothin' till to-morrow at eleven, and we sure can't find nothin' down in them woods now," remarked Kansas. "I'm proposin' that we roll in here and get a little sleep."

"That's sure all right with me," groaned Doc. "I ain't got nothin' picked, and if I had my feet wouldn't leave me go no further. I

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ain't been hoppin' the bowlders of them trails for the last month like you have. I'm ready to quit."

They found a little shelter in the lee of some rocks just below the hill where they rolled up in their blankets for a couple of hours' rest. The cold roused them in the gray light of dawn. Doc sat up and moved his legs stiffly.

"My God! Kansas!" he cried. "Give me a hand with these boots, till I see what in hell's the matter with my feet."

Together they struggled with the long police boots that Doc was wearing but it was utterly impossible to extricate him until the boots had been cut from the top to the toe. Laying back the parted shell Doc withdrew his legs gingerly and examined his aching feet. They were puffed and swollen beyond recognition, but freed from the restraint of the tight boots he found he could use them after a fashion. Standing on his blankets he directed his partner to cut a strip off the bottom of each trouser leg. Then he carefully inserted his feet into the gaping uppers of his boots and with this cloth for lashing he tied the flapping sides somewhat together across his instep and again halfway to his knee.

"Now!" he announced, stamping tentatively. "They're a bit drafty, but they'll get me to Dominion all right and back to Dawson too."

Other Klondikers who had also spent the night on the Dome were already astir when the partners dropped into the trail, and a number of men were moving silently through the woods. Doc, however, limped briskly ahead looking neither to the right hand nor the left. Even after the first diggings on the creek were reached and the other stampedeers had taken to the hillside to select their locations he held steadily on.

"Did you ever notice where the rich claims was on Bonanza?" he asked Kansas. "No? They're about halfway down. Same on Eldorado. I got a hunch they may be like that here."

After a few miles they had left the stampede behind and Doc slowed down to examine the hillsides above the claims they were passing.

"Most anywhere here will do," was his verdict. "You be cuttin'

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us four posts, Kansas, about four feet long while I scout around."

By the time Kansas had the four stakes trimmed and sharpened with their tops squared off Doc had made his selection.

"Come along and see what you think of it."

The slope he had chosen had an irregularity running across it like a long forgotten earthwork or the burrowing of some gigantic mole. This Doc pointed out.

"There must be a ridge in the bedrock under that, and if there ever was any gold to wash down the slope a lot musta caught behind it. The claims below cleaned up well last summer."

They located the lines of the two claims on the creek and sat down to wait for eleven o'clock, putting in the time carving the marking on their posts. They were to be labeled "M.L.P. (Mining Location Post) No. 1, and No. 2," and on the face of Number 1 Doc instructed Kansas to put the name and number of his claim.

"What is the name and number of that one I want?"

"It's a Dominion Hill Claim and the number must be the same as the creek claim below it. Leave the space for the number till you see what we're able to stake. Then under that put its length, two hundred and fifty feet, the date and your full name. Some of 'em only put initials but the regulations calls for full names, and you don't want to give them no excuse to turn you down at the Gold Commissioner's Office," explained Doc sagely. "Things ain't what they was before the new crowd come in but it don't do to take too many chances.

"Last summer seemed like a man with a rich claim just couldn't get it recorded. He had initials on his post, or it was faced the wrong way, or maybe his hair wasn't parted right when he pounded it in. And while he was foolin' round tryin' to get straightened out, some one else would stake and record it. There was a hell of a lot of complaint and all of a sudden Commissioner Walsh, the head of the government, calls a meetin' and asks for charges. The whole come as a surprise and fellows as had been done outa their claims wasn't in Dawson at the time. But some of the leadin' men told the Commissioner to give 'em till Monday and they'd get him evidence aplenty. They sent messengers out to all the creeks and

THE TWO BECOME MINERS

you bet them miners was comin' in. There'd a been a mass meetin' to talk about on Monday, only the Commissioner left town Sunday night. Probably there wasn't no connection a-tall between the two happenin's, but some men was sore enough to try and hitch somethin' onto somebody. And any one will have to say things has been plumb different since Ogilvie took over the outfit. He fired some clerks from the Records Office and one or two minor officials, and any man gets a square deal now. He's a white man."

"Did you get done out of your first claim?" Kansas asked.

"Not by the Government, I didn't. I was too damn careful and too damn careless. I'd heard about men havin' trouble at the Gold Commissioner's Office so I got me a lawyer to apply for my claim. Paid him a hundred dollars. Then together we gets a surveyor to make a survey so there wouldn't be no mix-up over lines. Paid him two hundred dollars—'as a retainer,' the lawyer says—and we goes out to the creek. I'd never thought of leavin' nobody to watch the claim for me while I was gone, and when we got up there some thievin' son of a pickpocket had chopped my name off my posts and had recorded his own. So I didn't have no claim."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Kansas sympathetically.

"What I said was hotter than that. But this time you're settin' here with a gun, you bein' the better shot of us two, and you're watchin' both them claims while I records 'em for the pardnership."

"That's all right with me," returned Kansas.

The system thus outlined was eminently successful. At the eleven o'clock signal, each one set his two posts claiming a strip of the hillside a thousand feet deep and two hundred and fifty feet long. Doc immediately returned to Dawson to make the records and pay their entry fees of fifteen dollars apiece, leaving Kansas to while away the hours of watching in chopping the lines required between the posts by the regulations. For good measure he laid out the other boundaries and chopped a line around their common plot. It gave him an excuse to patrol his territory as the men of the later stampede which had started from Dawson in the morning came in and took up land around him. It also gave him material for the cabin which must be built, and when the lines were all laid down

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he trimmed and notched the suitable logs. Doc joined in this work when he came back and as a result all that it was necessary to import from the sawmill in Dawson was the lumber for the door and their few articles of furniture.

They built the cabin with one window and one door according to the pattern used by the cattlemen in providing shelters on the mountain ranges in the Big Horns, with one alteration which Doc had picked up from the old timers of the Klondike. Instead of the usual fireplace and chimney they laid a stone hearth in the center of their floor space and built vents at the two gable ends under the moss-lined sod roof to let out the smoke.

"It saves all the heat there is in your fire and lets out the bad air better than a chimney," the sourdoughs had said.

The stove was set up at one side to be used for cooking. Two double bunks with a partition between them filled one end of the cabin, a generous shelf was braced against the wall beneath the window for a table. When a bench for the water bucket and hand-basin and several stools had been added the cabin was ready for occupancy.

By the time the two partners returned to Dawson to transport their winter supplies the freeze-up had come. A thick snow filled in and leveled off the trails, the Yukon was a sheet of ice from shore to shore and the city was once more alive. Pack-horses and mules had disappeared, many having been killed to make a supply of food for the dogs and the few that were to be kept over being under shelter. Dog-teams were everywhere, pulling up the trails with heavily loaded sleds, racing down with empty ones, or snapping and snarling at each other as they passed to and fro on Front Street. Even Bartlett Brothers arranged to transfer the supplies to Dominion Creek by dogs.

A chance rumor at the Aurora sent Kansas to the Police Barracks hunting a constable named Tobin, who was said to have come into the Yukon through Fort Selkirk with a patrol that had made its way from Edmonton overland. He found the policeman busied with his maps, but with time and attention to spare when he learned the reason for the American's interest.

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Suddenly Doc chuckled.

"I was just thinkin' of French Joe and how sure he was you couldn't get 'em here."

"It's like Slim said," pronounced Kansas complacently. "He didn't know Wyomin' wild horses."



Chapter XIX

THE END OF THE TRAIL

WORK on the hillside above Dominion Creek taught Kansas and Doc the truth of Lowe's remark that no Klondike gold was "easy." Shoveling off the snow from a spot above the long low ridge that they hoped marked a fold in the bed-rock they began to dig. The old timers on the creek claim below them had instructed them in the proper procedure. With picks they pried off the muck from a space six feet by three or four. It was slow work, for the muck was more than half ice.

"It's no use to fire until you get below it, for it'll drown out anything," the old timers said.

At first they worked together in their slowly sinking hole but as the excavation deepened they set up a windlass and took turns digging and turning the crank to raise the muck by the bucketful to the surface. At eight feet they struck the first real earth and could begin to "burn down." They built a fire over the floor of their pit, and kept it burning for eight hours and more, starting before daylight and ending long after darkness had set in. The next day they shoveled out about a foot of melted gravel and were ready to fire again. Four feet down in this gravel layer, Doc who was shoveling found his first gleam of yellow. With a wild yell he threw down his spade and scrambled up the ladder following the bucket that Kansas was grinding up. Together they rushed to the

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cabin, frantically stoked the stove on which they set snow in kettles to thaw, and feverishly rocked their first pan. When the last muddy water had been poured off there were unmistakable yellow flakes clinging to the tin bottom.

"We got 'colors' anyway," exulted Doc.

A pan taken at random in the afternoon showed a few more flakes but after another day of burning, the pans became no richer.

"How deep have you gone through the gravel?" asked the sourdoughs to whom they appealed for advice.

"Nearly six feet."

"Well, it's no use goin' no further. Move on twenty feet or so and try again."

They sank four of these prospect holes and, as they felt, wasted half the winter before they struck the increasing "chicken-feed" in the gravel that indicated a pay streak near. Even then when they had burned clear to bed-rock at a depth of thirty feet they had not found the rich dirt they were expecting. They knew what real pay dirt looked like, for they had watched a man on one of the creek claims empty a pocket from which he took out the gold by the shovelful like grains of wheat.

"You must have somethin' though, to get so much color," declared the old timers. "Try lateral burnin' across your claim. But be careful not to go down into your tunnel too soon after your fire is out."

They soon found out what was meant by "too soon." Lateral burning went much faster than burning down. As soon as they had their tunnel started they found that one firing would thaw several feet ahead, five or even six. So they pushed forward rapidly, burning one day, letting the work stand for the night and entering the tunnel by noon the next day. One afternoon Kansas calling down the hole before lowering the bucket for the second load received no reply. Realizing something was wrong he shouted at the men on the lower claim and seeing them starting toward him he let himself down the ladder. Before he had gone halfway to the bottom the old timers were peering into the pit.

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"Hey, Kansas!" they called. "Wait till we send you down the rope. Tie it around your waist. Then if you can reach him we can pull you both out."

The bucket came dangling down even as they spoke and Kansas loosed it to let it fall while he knotted the rope under his armpits. By the time he reached bed-rock his blood was pounding in his ears, but holding his breath he stooped and entered the tunnel. At the second step he stumbled over Doc's prostrate body. He managed to draw him forward, and to pass the rope around him twice, but with the exertion he found it necessary to breathe and at the second gasp he lost consciousness himself.

It took all the men from the neighboring claims to drag the two to the surface again, and after this occurrence not only Kansas and Doc but all the newcomers who had assisted at their rescue had a well-founded respect for the potency of charcoal fumes when confined in a tunnel.

The winter wore along monotonously. A moderately good pay streak was found midway between the third and fourth prospect holes, and Kansas and Doc laboriously brought it to their dump on the surface, bucketful by bucketful. In addition to this mining work each day they had to dry kindling for the many fires and to cook their meals. Occasionally they made trips to the sawmills in Dawson for the slabs and sawdust that they used as stove fuel. Slabs were fifty cents apiece, sawdust twenty-five cents a sack, and they could use great quantities of both.

These trips were a welcome change with the opportunities they gave for mingling with the crowds in the dance halls and saloons and hearing the gossip of the City. Once in the winter the talk was all of Faith Fenton's race to Selkirk, after the Indians who had murdered Sheehan had been reprieved. No one had expected the stay, the able newspaper woman least of all, and when it was announced that the mail would leave Dawson the day before the execution was to take place, Miss Fenton sat down and wrote out a fine circumstantial account of the first capital punishment to be inflicted in the Yukon and sent it off with the mail as a "scoop" for her paper. Then the reprieve had come, and Miss Fenton had

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flown to the Police Barracks to beg the use of a team to overtake the mail. The alternate driver was just in from a two hundred mile drive and Commissioner Steele refused to allow him to be aroused until he had had his sleep, but in the end he had overtaken the mailman and Miss Fenton was able to extract her "story" from the bag.

Toward spring the town was agog with the sanitary campaign. Dr. Good had been appointed health officer and he was determined that there should be no repetition of the typhoid epidemic of the previous year. With Constable Tobin for his sanitary inspector, he had made a tour of the town. There was plenty to see, for Dawson was situated on a frozen swamp and with the thousands of people who had been camping there in the past two years the accumulation of filth was unspeakable. The doctor and the Mounted Police tackled the problem courageously. Garbage and refuse was hauled out onto the river ice where it would be carried away by the break-up. Then suitable garbage dumps were located and regularly burned. The prisoners who had been at work all winter on the woodpiles were taken from this task as the weather moderated and were set to cleaning the streets and beginning the entrenchments for a system of drainage. And such was the tact of the two responsible officials that the many changes, inconvenient though they often were, had the whole-hearted support of the town. The ice went out from the Yukon in the stretch before the City on May eighth, and Dawson awaited the incoming of the rush over the passes with an equanimity which the medical staffs of barracks and hospitals had not before known.

The spring break-up brought water down the creeks again and changed the work of the miners on the claims. Once more Kansas and Doc visited Slavin's sawmill but this time to purchase lumber for making the equipment needed for the wash-up of their dirt. After bringing their freight to Bartlett Brothers and arranging for its transportation to Dominion, they moved on down the boardwalk intending to drop in at the Aurora for a gossip with Tom Chisholm, but just in front of the Opera House Kansas

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stumbled over a man in a worn mackinaw who was bending over to adjust a pack which he evidently was preparing to lift to his shoulders. Kansas gave vent to an irritated exclamation which, however, changed to a shout as the stooping man straightened up and faced him.

"Fritz! What the— When did you get in? This is Fritz Heise, Doc, who traveled with me and Slim from above Great Slave Lake clear through to the Rat River. When did you get in, Fritz?"

"I yust come here, Kansas, two days ago."

"Springer and Thomas here too? I'd sure like to see the old frauds!"

"Ach! Kansas!" The German's eyes had filled with tears. "Dey ain' here. Bot' of dem died on dot river last fall. I come t'rough mit der Indians vot vorks for de Company on snowshoes dis spring. Plenty men die on dot river, Kansas. Hunderts of dem. You couldn't to t'ink of soch a dretful ding."

"Come along with us to the Aurora, Fritz. We'll all have a drink and you can tell us about it."

"Of you oxcuse me, Kansas, I couldn't did it. I got two partners already—cigarmakers I know in Chicago, Germans same as me—I find dem here yesterday, and I vork for dem. I carry dis pack to der mine now by Hunker Creek."

"Then we'll drop in at the M. and N.," decreed Kansas. "That's on your way."

When the three were lined up at the bar, Fritz took up the story.

"Springer he died first. You remember he vos sick? He didn't get no better. He got vorse und vorse. Ve moved back by dot camp named Destruction City, but he yust got vorse und died. Dot vos a terrible sickness vot vos going around. Thomas he vos laying down sick ven Springer died. He got from his bed out and looked t'rough Springer's pockets. He took dot gold vatch vot Springer has. I told him, I says, 'You von't get no goot from dot vatch!' I told him but he vouldn't listen. In a little vile he vos dead, too. Everybody die on dot place, Kansas. Dey all die by dot camp Destruction City. Den mebbe some of dem try to go back by Fort Macpherson out, und dey die on der lower river. Indians

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tolds me everyvere dey see dead men. Some vos starved, some vos vore out, und der rest vos died in dot sickness. Hunderts Indians vos died too. You never hear soch a terrible ding. In springtime here come Indians vot been vorking for der Company in der vinter going back by der home on der Porcupine und I travel out mit dem. Ve seen signs from only von party vot cross dot Divide after you und Slim, Kansas. Und at Fort Yukon dey tolds us dere ain' but dree come dot way all de season. Dere vos von party, dree Indians und two vite men und der vite men vos crazy. Der Indians vos taking dem by Dawson to leave dem mit der Police. Dose come first, und den you, und den vos von man dot is went right out home from Fort Yukon."

"That must a been Buffalo Jones," said Kansas. "We seen him at Rampart House where we holed up in a storm. He crossed just after us. He said he wasn't goin' to the Klondike."

Fritz nodded absently.

"Vere's Slim?" he asked suddenly.

"Slim was sick when we got here and the doctor sent him home. He had that same sorta cold Springer had."

"Ach, so! I hope he gets over it more better as Springer did," said Fritz uneasily. "Mein Gott, yes!"

"Oh, he got home all right. In time for Christmas, too. My wife wrote me about it. Got her letter in the last mail to come in on the dogs. Slim was stronger than poor old Springer."

"Ach, yes," Fritz admitted with a sigh.

Kansas and Doc had plenty to keep them busy that spring. Unfortunately their claim was above the flume which supplied the creek diggings with running water to operate sluice-boxes and this obliged them to resort to the slow and laborious method of rocking out their dirt by hand. Copying the devices of the old timers, they built a box four feet long and twenty inches wide with a sloping bottom leading down to an open end. Above this open end they built a shallow hopper with an iron bottom punched out in quarter inch holes and fastened a strip of blanket beneath it to carry water from the hopper over to the closed end of the box. They lined the bottom of the box with another strip of blanket and placed on it

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an iron rack of angle-bars set one inch apart. The whole contrivance was mounted on rockers like a cradle. They also built a large wooden tank to hold water.

Each morning they filled this tank, carrying the water up by the pailful from the flume. Then one man shoveled dirt into the hopper of the cradle which the other partner kept rocking as he dipped water from the tank to pour over the dirt. Stones and coarse gravel were caught in the hopper but the fine stuff went through to the blanket and so down over the riffle-bars on the rocker's sloping floor. The swaying motion separated the heavier gold from the sand and dirt and the blankets and riffle-bars caught and held it.

Shovelful by shovelful they washed their dump, while May became June and the mosquitoes clung so thickly to their head-nets that it was difficult to breathe. A moist heat hung motionless in the creek valley, a steaming warmth that the two hours of twilight separating day and day could not moderate. The little cabin on the hillside with its canvas-covered window and its one door was an oven which was transformed by the vengeful piping of mosquitoes into an inferno at night.

Foot by foot the dump was reduced while June became July, and chechakos of the new rush scrambled curiously from claim to claim, asking questions and marveling, and Kansas and Doc realized suddenly that they were themselves "sourdoughs." At length the last shovelful of earth had been scraped up and washed, the last bag of dust was tied and ready to be transported to the bank, and the partners could sit idle on the step of their cabin, flapping lazily at mosquitoes and watching the mellow light of the evening sun resting like a mist on the gulch, veiling in color the havoc that their winter's toil had wrought. Their clean-up had been as they had expected from their testing pans, neither very rich nor very lean.

"It's hardly enough to grubstake me to Kluane," said Doc meditatively. "I ought to take three years' supplies in there to be safe."

"Maybe after we've got in the hay for them horses," suggested Kansas, "we could prospect a bit. We might strike somethin'."

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"Yes, we might," Doc agreed, but his voice was not hopeful.

At Dawson they turned in their dust at the new building of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, watched their friend Lowe run the assay and saw the government's tenth weighed out of their bags before the balance could be credited to their account.

"Seems like a hell of a big tax," observed Kansas, "when we have to pay all the expenses out of our end."

"Well, of course," explained Lowe, "the government has been to great expense in bringing in the Police, protecting life and property, running the mails and all that. And it's going to cost a lot more to put in roads to the diggings."

"They've been takin' ten per cent of all the gold dug in the Klondike here for two years through," said Doc, "and I ain't noticed nobody at work on them roads yet."

"There's fellows on Dominion," continued Kansas, "that ain't goin' to break even on this year's work, by the time they've paid the bills they're owin' for grub and lumber and freightin.' That don't seem right."

"No," admitted Lowe. "I think myself the tax should be on the net return and not on the gross. But the bank hasn't the deciding of that, unfortunately."

Next door in the Gold Commissioner's Office they arranged for leave of absence from their claims upon presentation of proof that the required three months' work on each entry had been performed.

"It ain't really necessary to do this," observed Doc, "but we don't want no chechakos startin' work in our holes while we're up hayin' on the Stewart."

Accordingly before leaving Dominion they posted, on their stakes and on the cabin door, a notice that the claims were not open for entry as the owners were absent by permission of the Gold Commissioner. They built a large barn of corrugated iron, finding that material cheaper than lumber, on the south side of the Klondike in Lousetown, and transferred to it the feed which the Alaska Commercial Company had imported for them. Then they

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departed on the dangerous adventure of haying in the Klondike, poling and tracking their scow up the tricky rapids of the Stewart to the meadows above Independence Creek, shooting wildly down again with their fragrant load of red-top grass. Scowload after scowload until the mows reached the rafters, and their gold-dust reserve at the Canadian Bank of Commerce dwindled perceptibly from the drain of the wages they had to draw to pay off their helpers. After that they waited for the coming of the horses, living in Doc's cabin in Dawson and filling in their time with odd jobs around town.

August passed. September came with shortening days and a growing chill in the air, and still the horsewranglers delayed their coming.

"I can't believe Packsaddle couldn't get through where them Police had been ahead of him," declared Kansas.

"What are you goin' to do with all that hay and feed if they don't come?" asked Doc.

"Hell! I don't know. Try to sell it to Bartlett's, I guess."

By the end of September he reluctantly agreed with Doc that it was the part of folly to keep the barn and its contents any longer, but he still put off broaching the subject of a sale to Bartlett Brothers from day to day.

"Seems like if I just don't sell that hay they can't be dead," he confessed, and Doc forbore to press him.

One evening the two were strolling down Front Street toward the Bank of Commerce, where they expected to meet Lowe. It was too early for the assayer to be through for the day and they loitered with eyes idly resting on the river. The rush of the summer season was over, the last steamers had left for down-river and only the smaller craft that plied to Bennett and White Horse were still running. One of these was tied up at the N. A. T. wharf. One or two isolated boats and rafts, the last stragglers of the season's great immigration over the passes, were paddling and drifting around the bend from the upper river. One of these caught Kansas' eye because there were horses on it—no, one horse and two mules. Scarce taking count of what he saw, he watched it. Three men were at

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the sweeps maneuvering the long platform to the shore. A boy in a red cap stood at the forward end.

The raft was drawing closer and the big roan horse, seeing a pack-train on the Company wharf, lifted his head, ears pricked, mane stirring in the river wind. Kansas stopped transfixed.

"Roman Nose!" he muttered under his breath.

And the boy in the red cap? With a shout to the astounded Doc, Kansas plunged over the bank, ran out to the end of the wharf, let himself down on a scow at the outer fringe of the miscellaneous craft packed solidly against the bank, and made his way at a breakneck pace over boats, and canoes, and flat decks to the point where the raft would touch, and as he ran he emitted wild cowpuncher yells that were answered in kind from the river. The raft grated to a standstill and three pairs of hands seized him and dragged him aboard.

"Kansas, you old wife-beater!" shouted Packsaddle, thumping him madly on the back.

"That ain't no name to give me," retorted Kansas. "I'll be callin' you a damn mule skinner next."

"We was bettin' you'd be in town to see us land, boss," volunteered Flapjack.

"That is, if you was out of jail," put in Andy Bell, and dodged the blow Kansas aimed at him.

"And Miss Anne," Kansas went on, taking the girl's two hands in his. "A sight of you ain't at all hard to take. But"—he looked around and back at her—"alone?" he asked.

Speechless, she nodded.

"My dear," he spoke tenderly, "I'm sorry. But I'm damn glad they got you through."

"Where's Slim?" they all chorused.

"Slim got sick. Had to go home last fall. But he's all right now. We had a letter from him this spring. Meet my new pardner!" He turned to drag Doc forward and the hubbub broke out afresh.

"Where'd you leave the horses?" asked Kansas when the excitement had somewhat subsided.

"God!" ejaculated Packsaddle. "Where didn't we leave 'em!"

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"That's too long a story, boss, to start now," declared Flapjack. "We oughta get ashore before we begin it. My feet is wet."

"It ain't exactly a tactful question, Kansas," said Andy, "seein' these is all we got now."

Kansas looked from Roman Nose to the mules and back to Roman Nose. Then he smiled at Packsaddle's troubled face.

"You sure picked the best ones to bring along," he said, "and Doc and me is here to tell you they ain' a-goin' to run out of grub, even if the winter is beginnin'."

Three hours later they were all gathered in Doc's cabin. They had partaken of a meal at the Fairview Hotel and had been talking steadily in alternate groups retailing their separate adventures. The horsewranglers had heard of the happenings on the river route and had reported the trouble with the Indians and the disaster in Hoole Canyon.

"We damn near starved before we got to Selkirk," declared Packsaddle. "I don't rightly remember the last few days of that trip down the Pelly, and I'm bettin' the others ain't no better. But we made it, and the soldiers and the Mounted Police fixed us up all right as soon as we reached the fort."

"If you was that short of grub, why didn't you kill one of the animals?" queried Doc.

"Hell!" retorted Packsaddle. "I'd as soon of eaten Miss Anne."

They turned to the discussion of plans. Packsaddle declared he had no desire to be a miner.

"Don't feel no call a-tall to go into that sorta work," he asserted. "Too old a dog to learn new tricks. I'm goin' into freightin', like you done, Kansas, when you first come. And if you ain't got no use for Roman Nose I'll buy him off you at any price you name. I ain't got cash but I'll work it out."

But Kansas, it seemed, was unwilling to sell.

"That horse is a friend of mine, Packsaddle," he said. "I can't sell him, but I'll give him to you with the understanding that you always uses him yourself and never turns him over to nobody."

It was agreed that the excess hay and feed not needed by the

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horse and mules was to be sold to Bartlett Brothers and the proceeds divided between Kansas and Doc.

"From what I've saw of them hay meadows," declared Andy, "I'll bet you've earned all you'll get."

"That sets me up with my grubstake to Kluane," exulted Doc. "anybody want a good claim, all improved? I'm sellin' out cheap."

"And I'd like to get home to Kitty," added Kansas, "if I could get any one to take mine over. How about it, Andy? Flapjack?"

"We ain't got no money, boss," said Flapjack.

"And if we had the money we ain't got no grub," Andy put in.

"If it wasn't for them little difficulties you'd like to take over the claims?"

"We sure would!"

"You bet!"

"I got the idea," exclaimed Doc. "We'll make 'em our paid representatives. Then they takes over and operates for us. The claims is good for any sorta grubstake they want with either of the big companies. They gives us half the clean-up next spring and then they can either buy the claims from us or if they prospect around and find somethin' better, they can sell 'em for us at the Yukon Exchange."

Flapjack and Andy were only too glad to enter into this arrangement.

"That's all settled then," said Kansas. "We go with you tomorrow to the Commissioner's and to the Commercial Company and fix things up. I suppose you'll be takin' your outfit to White Horse by this steamer layin' here, won't you, Doc? I believe I'll get ready and go on her too. I'm anxious to hit the trail for home."

"Is there a chance of getting home now?" asked Anne. "I thought the last boats for the Outside had left."

"Boats for the Outside from here has gone, Miss Anne, but the passes is open for foot-travel all winter, and you gets a boat at Skagway."

"Oh, then, please, Kansas, may I go with you?"

Kansas' eyes searched her face, then he looked at Flapjack, but the young cowpuncher gave no sign.

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"You can come with me and welcome, Miss Anne. But you ought to know they call it the worst trail this side of Hell. I think you'd be wiser to stay here and take a boat next spring. Your folks at home don't know nothin' about your trouble, so they won't be expectin'—"

"I have no folks left at home."

"Then you stay here. We'll arrange to put you up with Mrs. Wills. She'll find you somethin' to do that will put good money in your pocket. The boys will sorta look after you too, as they come and go, and Packsaddle'll be right here in town to—"

"Please, Kansas! I'd rather go. I'm used to bad trails now."

Again Kansas searched her pleading face. Then he spoke quietly.

"That's all right with me, Miss Anne. The boat leaves at noon. I'll call for you up at Mrs. Wills' in plenty of time."

They all walked with her to the cabin on the hill, where Mrs. Wills received her with a warm welcome and promised to help her to secure an outfit of clothing for the journey.

"There aren't many women in Dawson," she admitted with a smile, "but there isn't one of them that wouldn't lend her anything she could use. We'll fix her up, Mr. Gilbert, you'll see."

And she kept her promise so well that when Flapjack climbed the hill to the cabin the next morning he scarcely knew the girl in the brown suit who opened the door. She looked taller, some way, and it seemed to the boy as if she had drawn from these clothes an inner reënforcement for that thing which was separating them. He feared for a moment she might be completely out of his reach. Mrs. Wills certainly enjoyed his astonishment, and Anne took advantage of his discomfiture to assume control of the conversation which she resolutely kept to general topics, their adventures in pursuit of clothing, plans for the journey home, in running fire of chatter, until Mrs. Wills began almost to feel sorry for the big handsome fellow so hopelessly outmaneuvered. But suddenly he interrupted the girl in the midst of a sentence by getting abruptly to his feet.

"We ain't got no time to waste like this, Anne," he said, "if you're really goin' off on this boat."

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"Going off! Of course, I'm going off!" she flashed at him.

"Then, Mrs. Wills, is there any place her and me could talk alone?"

"Charlie! Please!"

He turned on her.

"Don't you know we've got to have this out? You can't just go like this, with what there is between us."

Mrs. Wills took a key from a nail on the wall.

"Mr. Sutherland's cabin is empty just beyond those trees. He's up on the creek now. And if you need a fire there's kindling under the stove," she said.

Taking the key the cowpuncher held open the front door, and mechanically Anne went out, across the side yard, stooping to avoid the clothes-lines, through the narrow belt of trees to the cabin beyond. Flapjack was silent, and still silent he unlocked the padlock on the door which he pushed open for her. As the one room was cold he quickly made up a fire in the stove and drew a bench from the wall beside it.

"Sit down," he said, and she sat, although a wild panic made her long to run.

He tended his fire still without speaking, feeding it skillfully until he had a steady blaze, while the girl sought desperately for some safe subject with which she might break in upon this silence. But she sought in vain, for her thoughts seemed to flee in fear around the corners of her mind. At last the man appeared to have come to some conclusion. He sat down beside her and took her reluctant hands in his.

"Please!" she begged again, but he did not let them go.

"Why don't you want me to touch you?" he asked.

She looked up at him with honest eyes.

"I guess it's because I'm afraid."

He nodded.

"That's just it. And don't you see, if you was sure of yourself you wouldn't be afraid of me? You ain't sure, even after a year of thinkin' about it yourself, that you're right. And that's why

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you've got to let me think about it too. We can't afford to make no mistakes about anything as big as what we touched on for a day or two a year ago. And so, dear, you're goin' to have to tell me what come between us when your Mother died."

"Oh, Charlie!" she cried piteously. "I don't know how to tell you. It's all so queer and mixed-up—and dreadful!"

He waited for her to go on, and when he saw she could not he took up his questioning.

"Is it all because you was quarrelin' with her about me when it happened? You can't get over what you said to her?"

She shook her head.

"Father set me straight on that. He made me see that Mother understood I didn't mean it, even before she died. And he believed that she is with us now, seeing what we do—and all."

"He probably is right about that, too," said the cowpuncher. "Leastways, I've always believed the same about my mother."

"But, Charlie, don't you see what that does to us! She didn't want me to marry you. She—she knew a lot about life, Charlie, and she was sure that I could never make you happy because I could never understand you, she said. We were brought up so differently, it would always come between. And you deserved a wife who could understand you, she said."

"I see." He spoke slowly.

"And so all I can do is what I'm doing. I've got to go away and leave you to forget it all. People do forget things in time. It's true I was afraid of you, because I didn't want you to know that I don't want to go—I don't want to go. But if you're right and Father was right, then she's here, and he's here too, in this room, watching me, expecting me to do what I should. Oh, please go, go now, please. I—I can't stand this any longer."

"No," said her lover quietly. "I can't go now, because you got your mother all wrong."

Slowly she raised her head and looked at him with tear-filled eyes, her fingers for the first time clinging to his hands.

"All wrong?" she breathed.

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"Sure thing! She knowed a lot about life, but she didn't know the half then of what she knows now. And don't you never forget she's in this room, knowin' all the rest of it, watchin' you and expectin' you to do what you should. Looks like you ain't never thought about what she didn't know last summer."

"What?"

"Well, she didn't really know about you and me. She see us together when other folks was around. We wasn't much like ourselves, was we? She heard the way I talk and she sure savvied without bein' told that I hadn't had no schoolin' to boast about; but what did she know about the way we get along without words? She knows all about that now. Ain't it true that most always I know what you're thinkin' without you tellin' me? And don't you get me the same way? The few times we has to take to words we can put up with a difference in grammar. It ain't important, measured by the understandin' we have. Anne, Anne, remember how you felt at Humbug City on the Pelly? You near went crazy thinkin' the North was gettin' you. But it wasn't you the North was after, it was your humbugs. After all the North has done to me and you these two years, bringin' us together, you ain't goin' away because you don't yet know the difference between what's real and what ain't?"

He fell silent, questioning the girl's eyes, and there was in this silence a quality that Anne did not fear. When after a moment he rose to his feet and drew her to him she yielded without the least withholding, hiding her face in the hollow of his neck, and feeling again as she had in the river after the forest fire, life thrilling and pulsing through them both. The man spoke first with his cheek against her hair.

"Your mother knows about this, Anne, an' what do you think she is sayin'?"

For answer the girl raised her lips to his.

A knock at the door roused them.

"It's me," called Kansas. "Steamer time!"

Together they crossed to the door and opened it.

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"Anne's changed her mind, boss," announced Flapjack. "She ain't a-goin'."

Kansas surveyed the girl with satisfaction.

"Well, I'm damn glad you've showed some good horse sense, at last," he said.

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WHEN I first discussed with Kansas Gilbert the problem of making a book of this enterprise of his, I ran on an important gap in his knowledge. Actually he was the one who was so ill when they reached Dawson that he was obliged to take the next boat home and Slim was the partner who remained. It was Slim, then, who met and talked with Fritz, who saw Flapjack and Anne and knew of their marriage in Dawson and who witnessed the arrival of Packsaddle and Andy on the raft with the two mules and the Roman-nosed horse from Paint Rock. And Slim has been dead for years.

Neither Packsaddle nor Andy ever returned from the Klondike and friends in this country presume they are dead. All that remained of actual knowledge of the adventures and fate of the party with the horses was what Kansas could remember, after a lapse of thirty years, that Slim had told him of Packsaddle's report. This third-hand information was discouragingly meager. It set forth that they had succeeded in getting most of the horses to the Dease Lake country where they wintered, that they lost most of the horses between the Dease Lake country and a branch of the Yukon as they arrived at that river with only ten head, that they built a raft to float down this river but soon after they started they encountered a gorge where the raft was wrecked, that they managed to pull out two mules and a horse but lost food, guns and ammunition, and were obliged to live for two weeks on rose-haws, and that they came out on the Yukon at Fort Selkirk, and drifted into Dawson in the fall of 1899.

Fort Selkirk identified "the branch of the Yukon" as the Pelly, but what route the party took from the Dease Lake country to this river, or from the Peace to the Dease Lake country, was a matter for conjecture or research. Kansas considered the subject of little importance.

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"Hell, miss! Say anythin' you like," was his advice. "Nobody don't know no different."

For a long time it seemed as if his last statement were correct. Surprisingly little has been written even about the Mackenzie Basin, but of an overland route from the Peace to the Yukon there was apparently nothing at all, although maps published in 1897 for the edification of prospective Klondikers showed a nice red line leading straight from one to the other, with a pleasing disregard for the ranges of the Continental Divide.

With the realization that this book was probably the first attempt to picture the experiences of Klondikers on the Edmonton Trail, I became determined to find some records which would make it possible to give as faithful a presentation of the overland branch as the diary afforded for the river section. Assisted by Canadian librarians I went through the published records of their Department of the Interior, reports of surveyors and of engineers attached to the Department of Mines, and the invaluable collection of material brought together by Ernest Chambers in *THE UNEXPLOITED WEST, THE GREAT MACKENZIE BASIN and CANADA'S FERTILE NORTHLAND*. From these sources and from the writings of missionaries, sportsmen and explorers like Warburton Pike, I began to get a fair picture of the Peace and Mackenzie rivers, the valley of the Liard and the Dease Lake country, but the territory between these great valleys remained as unknown as ever. Mr. Robinson of the Vancouver Library secured for me a copy of an unpublished journal of Robert Campbell, the Hudson's Bay Company man who discovered the route from Dease Lake to the Pelly and who had founded Fort Selkirk. He had maintained a line of communication until 1853 with Fort Simpson on the Mackenzie but his travel was always by canoe or York boat, an impossible method for a herd of horses which could only make its way, along the rivers he followed, in winter and on the ice. Yet Kansas was emphatic that the horses had spent the winter in the Dease Lake country and not in travel.

It looked like a pretty riddle until an obscure reference by Ernest Chambers suggested a solution. Mr. Chambers in listing the

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explorations of the Mounted Police mentioned a patrol which had made a reconnaissance from Fort St. John to the Yukon in 1897 and 1898. A letter to the Commissioner of Royal Canadian Mounted Police brought me the report of Inspector Moodie who headed this patrol and photostatic copies of their maps. When I read Inspector Moodie's instructions and saw he was ordered to go from Edmonton by way of Fort Sylvester on the Dease River to Pelly Banks by "the shortest route that is always by land and practicable for pack horses," when I learned that his report was in the nature of a journal with daily entries and that he made his march with a small herd of ten loose horses, I knew that the record needed as a basis for the other half of this story had been found.

Inspector Moodie crossed from Fort St. John to Fort Graham on the Finlay River in the winter of 1897 and 1898, but he stated that before he left Graham in 1898 parties were coming in from Fort St. John on the trail he had made. It would be absurd to suppose that Packsaddle would attempt any other route when the Police were making a trail for horses ahead of him.

If further confirmation is necessary, Inspector Moodie states that he passed the "Good Hope Party" camped at the mouth of the Ingenica River "waiting till August first for a pack-train from St. John." There was no pack-train at Fort St. John except that used by the Company in forwarding its freight beyond the Mountain Portage above Hudson Hope, which naturally could not be turned to other use, and it will be remembered that Kansas and Slim met the scouts of the Good Hope Party on the Peace River and suggested they use Packsaddle as their freighter. Furthermore, Moodie reports that when he went through Sylvester's Upper Post in the Dease country he ordered all parties that were following him to go no further that season. "All went out by the way of Glenora," he said. "Some intended trying to get work freighting . . . supplies for the Company to the head of Dease Lake . . . and said they would follow our trail next year." Packsaddle, we know, wintered in Dease Lake and followed the trail to Pelly Banks in 1899.

When Moodie's Patrol left Sylvester's the Company store and the

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outside traders were all completely out of provisions. The usual pack-train services had been demoralized by the news from the Klondike and were all working for the high prices they could demand transporting goldseeker's freight from Glenora to Teslin on the so-called Telegraph Trail. Yet when Captain Carman, of Edmonton, reached Glenora late in 1898 there was a pack-train working back and forth between that town and Dease Lake freighting for the Company, and he said that they were able to work unusually late that year because of the unseasonable open weather. This explains why there was no appeal to the Police stationed at the International Boundary on the Stikine for assistance in obtaining winter supplies for the Dease Lake country. Packsaddle had intended freighting for the Company in the first place, and it is not likely that any other pack-train was in the Dease Lake country to come to the rescue of the denuded posts. It seems a fair assumption that the freighters on the Cassiar Trail in the fall of 1898 were these horsewranglers who are known to have wintered there.

The book then took shape. The first eleven chapters, dealing with the journey from Wyoming to the Peace and the trip around by the rivers to Dawson, are based on the diary of Kansas Gilbert, filled out and substantiated by the research I have just indicated. Chapters twelve and thirteen and fifteen through seventeen, dealing with the overland branch of the trail, are based on the official journal of Inspector Moodie. The accidents to the horses, with a single exception mentioned later, the flood of the Acqui-ica, the meeting with Jack Graham, the narrow escape from the forest fire—in fact, all the incidents of the journey save only those connected with the romance of Flapjack and Anne will be found in the Annual Report of the Northwest Mounted Police of 1898. Chapters fourteen, eighteen and nineteen, dealing with Dawson and the mines, are based on experience during the winter of 1898 and 1899 of living Klondikers with whom I talked while in Edmonton, backed by such authorities as William Ogilvie, Colonel Samuel Steele, Angelo Heilprin, and Ross's HISTORY OF THE CANADIAN BANK OF COMMERCE.

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In four cases rearrangement of facts to fit the framework of the story was needed. One has already been indicated. Kansas actually returned home immediately upon his arrival in Dawson. To have ended the book at this point would have been to leave the fate of the horses and of Flapjack and Anne unknown. For the sake of unity it seemed wise to keep Kansas in the center of the picture for the three chapters dealing with Dawson as he had been through the first eleven, particularly since invention was necessary in any event as the details of Slim's adventures at that time are unknown. The outline of what happened to Slim has been followed. He mined with one partner on a creek not far from Dawson, digging all winter and washing out his dirt in the summer with only a moderately fortunate yield. He saw Fritz and learned of the fate of Springer and Thomas, and as already stated, he saw the arrival of the others of the original party. He returned home in the late fall of 1899.

The second variation was the reappearance of Doc from whom they had parted at Fort McLeod, as the winter's partner in Dawson. This was done to avoid introducing another figure onto a canvas already crowded. We do not know who Slim's Dawson partner actually was.

In the third place, Flapjack and the party known as "the Shirleys" did not travel with the horsewranglers beyond Fort St. John. Flapjack joined the Shirleys as indicated in chapter seven after such a conversation as is reported with his former partners. They started down the river route but took two years to the journey, as Slim met them in Dawson shortly after their arrival in 1899. The girl's father and mother both died on the road, where we do not know, and she married the round-up cook as soon as they got through. They later returned to Wyoming where Flapjack Charlie died. The girl married again and left the locality and as no one could remember the name of her second husband it was impossible to obtain the true details of her romance. If she is alive and should read this book I hope she will pardon the liberty taken with her story. To avoid further complexity of plot this whole romance was united to the journey of the horses. It would only

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otherwise have been a third element which would merely repeat and lengthen out the experience of Kansas and Slim.

The fourth instance was a case of combining three incidents into one to explain the loss of most of the wild horses between Sylvester's Post and Pelly Banks. The place where they were undoubtedly kept was the regular winter-range for the Company's horses. The mountains which shelter it appear on the map as the Horse Ranch Mountains. To suppose that this wild breed would die of exposure in such a place when they had successfully survived the winter on the trail out from Edmonton where hundreds of horses perished was manifestly absurd. The conditions of the trail from Sylvester's to Pelly Banks as described by Moodie could account for the loss of only a few head. It was necessary to find something catastrophic to make the disappearance of two-thirds of the herd believable.

A chance remark by Charles Mair, a member of the Commission which negotiated the Treaty of 1899 with the Athabaska and Peace River Indian tribes, in his *THROUGH THE MACKENZIE BASIN* gave the first clue. At Dunvegan in 1899, Mr. Mair reported "a rumor that some whites who had robbed the Indians on the Upper Liard had been murdered." He added that as it was "not known what white man had penetrated to that desolate region the rumor was never verified." We know that at least Packsaddle and his party had penetrated to that desolate region, and here was evidence that they—or some one else—had fallen into difficulties with the Indians. Just what the nature of the difficulty might be no one could guess from the form taken by a rumor after a thousand miles of word of mouth transmission. I therefore determined to have the Indians murder the two elder Shirleys and to stage a dramatic rescue of the young girl by the young men and wind up with a wild ride for safety on the part of the four with ten of the horses. From the point of view of American Indian history it was a plausible idea. But when I began delving into Canadian Indian history it was impossible, for Canadian Indians in the West have never murdered the whites. Only one massacre of settlers could I find and that was perpetrated by renegades at the time of the

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Second Riel Rebellion, as part of a plan of campaign. These incontrovertible facts effectually put a stop to my murder-rescue-escape idea.

Perforce I had to study the sort of difficulties which Canadians did have with their Indians and how they handled them, and I recommend attention to this last element of the problem to those who would learn the secret of Canadian success in a field where we have so lamentably failed. In the Police reports I found two incidents which are combined into the Judgment in the Wilderness. A member of a Klondike Party near Fort St. John shot two stallions belonging to Chief Montaignie because they were chasing his horses. The chief sent two parties to intercept the men whom they trailed for a number of days. They brought the white men back to Fort St. John and laid the matter before a Police Inspector who happened to be there. He reported with disappointing succinctness that "the matter was settled." The other incident was reported by Colonel Steele during the early years when the Canadian Pacific Railroad was being built. A white rancher killed an Indian near the line which the Mounted Police were guarding, and the Indians were threatening to go on the warpath in revenge. Colonel Steele who was then an inspector persuaded the Indians to accept a certain number of the rancher's cattle in payment for their tribesman's life. The two incidents together with the facts that the Liard Indians eat horseflesh when they can get it and that they were reported by Company men to be on the verge of starvation in the winter of 1898 and 1899 because of an unprecedented scarcity of game—these elements were combined with the well-known American plainsman's reaction to the theft or killing of horses to make the incident in chapter seventeen.

Thus far I have been considering the sources for the book other than the diary and memories of Kansas Gilbert. The trustworthiness of that diary and those memories was confirmed at every turn. Old Edmonton residents remembered the incredible English lords, the snow-engine, and the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Show. Old settlers on Peace River recalled Cayuse Graham and declared his befriending the Wyoming men was quite in keeping with his char-

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acter. Captain Cowley pointed out his cabin, still standing on the banks of Peace River across from the mouth of Bear Creek. At Peace River Town I met an Indian named Joe St. Germain who was one of a party of five, three Indians and two white men, who went down the river and over the Rat Portage to the Yukon a few weeks ahead of Kansas and his party. He agreed with the Wyoming man's descriptions in every detail and stated that no one could exaggerate the difficulties of the crossing of the Divide. Of the two white men in his party one died near Fort Yukon and the other went insane before they got through. The Indians turned him over to the police in Dawson for the winter and in the spring of 1899 Joe and another man took him out to an asylum in Vancouver.

I had long felt that the spectacular rescue of the Indian recounted in chapter eight would be subject to question as being too much like a moving picture scenario to be a fact. Thinking that such an occurrence involving another Indian even though it had happened after Joe had gone through might be known to him I asked if he had heard that a Chipewyan acting as guide at Fort Smith had been abandoned on a rock in the rapids. His eyes grew thoughtful.

"Yas," he said, "yas. 'Ees name was—" he evidently was searching his memory—" 'ees name was—Savanaugh."

Savanaugh was the name given by Kansas in the diary.

"Tell me, Joe," I said, "what happened to him? Did he die on the rock in the river?"

"No! No, dose Klondikers got 'im off."

"Who, Joe? The men he was guiding?"

"No! Dose oder Klondikers, dey got 'im off."

"How did they do it?"

Joe St. Germain smiled.

"You know, dat's funny t'ing," he said. "Dey did it wit' a rope."

LIST OF KLONDIKER PARTIES PASSED

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Approximate Location</i> | <i>Diary Reference</i> |
|---|-------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Allen Party | June 16 | Fort Smith on Slave River | Allen Party left to day |
| Bellinger, Mont., Party | June 13 | Fort Smith on Slave River | Boats came in Bellinger Montana Bellinger Pi- rate . . . |
| Boat Named Biddy | June 23 | Lower Slave River | Five other Boats left Same time York Boat and the Biddy |
| Boat Named Elsa | June 16 | Fort Smith on Slave River | More Boats comming Joker Elsa Northern Star |
| Boat Named Helmlich | June 13 | Fort Smith on Slave River | Boats came in . . . Helm- lich Mangrate and 3 with- out a name |
| Boat Named Iowa | June 13 | Fort Smith on Slave River | The Iowa came to [o] |
| Boat Named Joker | June 16 | Fort Smith on Slave River | More Boats comming Joker Elsa Northern Star |
| Boat Named Los Angeles | June 13 | Fort Smith on Slave River | Boats came in . . . Los Angeles and two more |
| Boat Named Mangrate | June 13 | Fort Smith on Slave River | Boats came in . . . Helm- lich Mangrate and 3 with- out a name |
| Boat Named the Nelley | June 30 | Fort Providence, Great Slave Lake | the Nelley was thear |
| Boat Named Northern Star | June 16 | Fort Smith on Slave River | More Boats comming Joker Elsa Northern Star |
| Boat Named Undine | June 13 | Fort Smith on Slave River | Boats came in . . . Undine |
| | June 21 | Lower Slave River | Undine and two other are here |
| Lame Booth | June 17 | Fort Smith on Slave River | Meet Lame Booth to day |
| California Party with Kansas Gilbert from Fort Smith to Rat River see Narrative pp. 136-172 | May 28 | Junction of Peace and Slave Rivers | Came up with Putnams Party and the Calafornia Party ate dinner with them below was Rapids Run the Rapids all right Came on down to Secound Rapids and camped . . . Putnam and California camp with us to night |

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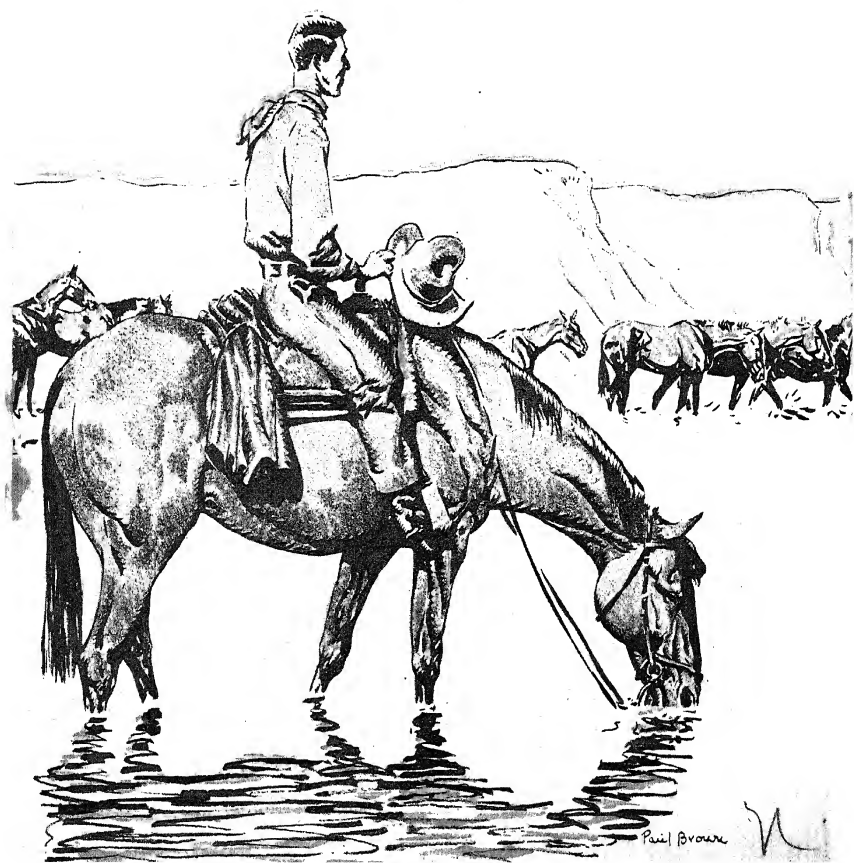
| <i>Name</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Approximate Location</i> | <i>Diary Reference</i> |
|--|-------------|---|--|
| | June 17 | Fort Smith on Slave River | made a Bargin with Springer and will go in the California |
| | July 27 | Rat River 5 miles above first rapids | Left Springer tommas and fritz to day |
| Cary | May 14 | Bear Creek (also called Pouce Coupe River) on Peace River 60 miles above Dunvegan | Cary Smokey and we are going to Split up |
| Chicago Party | Jan 20 | Edmonton | Three Chicago men came out and stayed all night with us |
| | Jan 21 | Edmonton | Chicago men left here to day |
| | June 13 | Fort Smith on Slave River | Boats came in . . . Chicago |
| Two men From Chicago | Aug 1 | Upper Rat River | Passed two men from Chicago have been on road sience last August badly Discouraged |
| Cunningham Tarleton Party with Kansas Gilbert from Rat River to Dawson—see Narrative pp. 156-161 pp. 167-194 | July 5 | Mackenzie River below Fort Wrigley | a nother party came here last night |
| | July 18 | Peel River near mouth | Starting up Rat River with two other Boys |
| Durks or Dacks | | see Norris Party | |
| Durrant-Smith Party | Mar 8 | Muskegy Creek 15 miles from Vermilion River between Athabaska and Swan rivers (Smith from Montana, Durrant from California) | the Smith and Durrant Party just passed here |
| Finnagin | Feb 9 | Edmonton | Finnagin cam out to see us and at night went to Salvashin Army |
| French Party | May 29 | Slave River above Fort Smith | catched up with French Party to day |
| Big French Party from eastern Canada | July 29 | Upper Rat River below the canyon | Passed 4 Frenchmen |
| | July 31 | " | Big french Party comming here to day 11 men |

LIST OF KLONDIKER PARTIES PASSED

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Approximate Location</i> | <i>Diary Reference</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|---|---|
| | Aug 3 | Upper Rat River above the canyon | a man fro the big "French" party went up to look at the creek |
| Fritz | | see California Party | |
| Good Hope Party | Mar 7 | Vermilion River between Athabaska and Swan rivers | Good Hope Party camped on the other side of the Park |
| | Apr 6 | Dunvegan on Peace River | five or Six Partys camped here Good Hope building a boat |
| | May 16 | " | Two Good Hope men thear and the Rest gon over land |
| Hermans Party | July 28 | Upper Rat River | Herman Party came on and camped at the Big Bend of Rat |
| Kelley | July 18 | Lower Peel River | Spear & Kelley started but did [not] go far |
| McGee | July 18 | Lower Peel River | McGee started to Mc Phir-son |
| Norris Party | Mar 21 | Lesser Slave Lake | Noris Party staid here to day |
| | Apr 10 | Peace River about 30 miles above Dunvegan | Dad and Durks went a hunting |
| | Apr 26 | Bear Creek (also called Pouce Coupe River) on Peace River about 60 miles above Dunvegan | Durks loded Travoy's to day |
| | Apr 27 | " | Norris Party left this morning |
| | Apr 30 | " | Durks and Norris was here to day wanting to go with us by Boat |
| O'Brien Party (Lost a lot of horses) | Mar 5 | Beaver Creek near Paddle River (Athabaska Country) | Obrian Party camped here |
| Putnam Party | Mar 11 | Vermilion Creek between Athabaska and Swan rivers | Putnam was bucked off here at our camp |
| | May 28 | Junction of Peace and Slave rivers | Came up with Putnam's Party and the Calafornia Party ate dinner with them below was Rapids Run the Rapids all right Came on down to Secound Rapids and camped . . . Putnam and California camped with us to night |
| Quick | Jan 12 | Edmonton | Quick came and stayed with us to night |

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| <i>Name</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Approximate Location</i> | <i>Diary Reference</i> |
|--|-------------|--|---|
| Shamrock and Thistle Party | July 22 | Rat River, First Rapids | Met Shamrock and Thistle Party here |
| Smith-Durrant Party | Feb 14 | Edmonton | the Smith outfit left to [o] and they own a farm to [o] |
| | Mar 8 | Muskegy Creek about 15 miles from Vermilion River between Athabaska and Swan (Smith was from Montana, Durrant from California) | the Smith and Durrant party just passed here |
| Smokey | May 14 | Bear Creek (also called Pouce Coupe River) on Peace River about 60 miles above Dunvegan | Cary Smokey and we are going to Split up |
| Spear | July 18 | Lower Peel River | Spear & Kelley started but did [not] go far |
| Springer | | see California Party | |
| Four Swedes (from Dakota) | July 27 | Upper Rat River | Passed the Four Sweeds |
| Tarleton-Cunningham Party with Kansas Gilbert from Rat River to Dawson—see Narrative pp. 156-161 pp. 167-194 | July 5 | Mackenzie River below Fort Wrigley | a nother party came here last night |
| | July 18 | Lower Peel River near mouth | Starting up for Rat River with two other Boys |
| Thomas | | see California Party | |
| Tonnis | Apr 29 | Bear Creek (also called Pouce Coupe River) on Peace River about 60 miles above Dunvegan | Wairs and Tonnis came over to day |
| Wairs | Apr 29 | Bear Creek (also called Pouce Coupe River) on Peace River about 60 miles above Dunvegan | Wairs and Tonnis came over to day |
| Willis Party | Mar 11 | New Police Trail to Fort St. John near Junction with old trail to Lesser Slave Lake | Willis Party camped on new trail and cannot get horses Starving |
| | Mar 13 | " | We hird to day Willis Party horses was Starving and was Offering 60 per head for horses |
| | May 19 | Point Wolverine (Carcajou) on Peace River | Passed Willis Party |



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